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HOMESTEAD HIGHWAYS

HOMESTEAD HIGHWAYS

BY

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AUTHOR OF "PROSE PASTORALS"

BOSTON

TICKNOR AND COMPANY

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1888

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ELECTROTYPED BY
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To my Friend

CHARLES E. HURD, ESQ.

TO WHOSE FRIENDLY SUGGESTION AND ENCOURAGEMENT
ITS WRITING IS IN SOME PART DUE,

THIS BOOK

IS DEDICATED BY

THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

NATURE is the mother of sentiment, and to multitudes of people nothing is more charming in its reminiscent quality than the old New England country life. Away from its quiet homesteads and tree-shadowed highways, into the noisy, crowded ruts of the city, the awakened memories of its old-fashioned and simple habits, its plain fare, its open-handed hospitality, are like beautiful pictures swept clear of years of dust and cobwebs. A boyhood or a girlhood laid among such pastoral scenes is the halcyon period of a life-time. Of such, among the fields, the woods, the meadows and streams, my book is in part a suggestion.

QUINCY, MASS., May 1, 1888.

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L' ENVOI.

"*As the spinners to the end*
Downward go and re-ascend,
Gleam the long threads in the sun;
While within this brain of mine
Cobwebs, brighter and more fine,
By the busy wheel are spun."

LONGFELLOW.

A MUTE PROPHECY.

A MUTE PROPHECY.

ASLANT the threshold of the West
Stretches a sombre reef
Of gray; its low, uneven scarp,
Outlined in sharp relief
Against the sky, is roughly set
With pinnacles that glow
Like Norombega's mystery
Of centuries ago.
The hills, with rugged, rock-set domes,
Wind-blown and bare, uprear
Their brightly polished topaz walls,
In the clear atmosphere;
While o'er the cloud's thin, ragged rift
Burst the deep golden floods
Of Nature's alchemy, that sift
Their glory through the woods.

Night comes: the Spirit of the Frost
His shuttle swifter plies
'Twixt Nature's warp, and swifter weaves
For Earth its subtle guise;
And down the river-path the pines
Echo the dreary cry
Of winds whose dying cadences
Are Nature's lullaby.
In the crisp air of growing dusk
Night sets her cordon-line
Thick with groups of glittering stars,
That weirdly burn and shine,
And come and go, as silently
As lights that far at sea
Are sailed o'er restless tides, by hands
We cannot know or see.

AN OLD-FASHIONED FESTIVAL.

AN OLD-FASHIONED FESTIVAL.

THE transition from royal-hued golden-rod and humble frost-flower, from the brown woodlands and sunny, restful days of October to the gray, dreary moods of November, is hardly noticeable until the skies are overcast and the winds blow chill with threatening cold, until the wandering snow-flake, drifting slowly, silently, out of the gusty North, brings an abrupt awakening to one's dream of lingering summer. Like the birds of passage that have taken their departure so abruptly, blossoming June, Midsummer, and nutty October have journeyed into other lands, to return like our old friends, the singing birds, with coming days, days well rounded with additional cheer and welcome. Nature is full of quaint conceits, but is more lovable for them all. How much of prophecy one day holds of those immediately following is revealed only to the most intimate acquaintances of Nature, and yet what she holds for one she holds for all. Once within the spell of her witchery, and we read her signs clearly. What a novel-writer she is! What ro-

mances of orchard and wayside, and what deeps of woodland tragedy, what plots and counter-plots are hers! But Nature is a great confidant; and if you will stop a moment by the way to listen, she will tell you many a wonderful tale, and much that you will be surprised to know. Never of garrulous habit, as is our friend who cannot finish his story until his finger is well fastened in our button-hole, she is, for all that, a great talker; and if you wish to hear what she has to say, you must listen with wide-open eyes, for there are ways of hearing without the domain of the ears, as your eyes will best tell you; yet without the careful training of both eye and ear, so far as any converse with Nature is concerned, you might well be both blind and deaf.

Day after day the brilliant orange of the golden-rod towering above the pasture hedges in its stately beauty, crowding every niche in the sharp angles of the sagging rail fences, — the one bit of bright color in the fields, — the pale blue of the gentian by the meadow brooks, the delicate beauty of the wayside flower, always known as the harbinger of the ending year, and the rich hues of the woods grow fainter, grayer yet, until they are but the apparitions of their former selves. Forest and field grow grayer with every white frost, and the skies above them are colder, grayer than all else.

There is something human about these ways of Nature, so full of hints of ice-crystals and blustering, snowy winds. The frosty autumn, like some people in their ways, once genial but now grown distant and unsympathizing, has a touch of vague warning and reproach. What a chilly greeting every morning, bright or dull, brings with it! The very sun, that rode so imperiously over the summer-lands, bends lower down in the south, as if full of foreboding. These still days are alive with notes of preparation, as if something of estrangement and evil were impending, so surly are the influences which follow in the train of bleak November, the Disillusionist of the year, with its short days and lengthening nights.

Leaden shadows shut down over the bare country-ways, now silent and deserted, down over the mazy windings of the sleepy lowland wood-roads, above the grass-grown ruts of which are spread out the wide-flaring tops of the trees blown clear of their singing leaves, and that nowadays are ever reaching out their brown arms into the openings, as if to get ample room to swing themselves in the coming wintry tempests. The rushes in the swamps, that stand stark and straight as ever, have grown dun-colored and sombre-hued, and the gnarled, scraggy-limbed apple-trees on the hill-side, and along the fences and boundary lines of the fields, are barren of all fruitage except a

solitary apple, clinging with obstinate grip to the topmost twig here and there in the orchard, each one a small, black spot against the sky. But the grass in the swales holds its brilliancy of verdure, while the edges of the runlets are daintily frescoed with rare prismatic colors which play about their fretwork of icy cornice and frieze with every glint of sunshine. Down on the meadow-lands, over the margins of the streams, filled to the brim with the passing over of the heavy fall rains, the bushy-topped willows lean far out, their black, massy, misshapen trunks bristling with hosts of long and slender lances of light green, tipped with Venetian red, as if held in a huge quiver, or sticking out thickly like the quills of a porcupine; and above and below are translucent panels of earth and sky, and what bits of glorious coloring they are! What deep, black pools are these that stop the swiftly rushing waters for a moment! The musk-rats do not seem to relish these episodes in Nature, of down-coming floods that sweep their dwellings swiftly downstream, and scurry here and there with increased activity to repair the damage to their houses. Here comes one of these water-folk swiftly swimming with the current, to make a sudden dive down into the deeps of Great Brook so soon as he is aware of my intrusion upon his domain. A partridge bursts from cover in the fringe of alders behind me, and, with a startled

whir, crosses the brook, to disappear in the dwarf birches opposite. These are the only signs of animate life. A huge white owl has his home here in a neighboring hollow stub, but I have seen nothing of him to-day. He is no doubt dozing after his predatory flight of last night, or planning some midnight raid upon Farmer Spurr's chicken-roost, — the conscienceless robber! He is a beautiful fellow, as shy and afraid of being seen as the most bashful urchin you ever saw. His flight is well-nigh noiseless, but I have often caught sight of him among the meadow elms, on misty days, when I have been following down the winding pathway of the meadow brook after trout. In the pasture the cattle roam about lonesome-like, or wait beside the bars in the growing cold of the nightfall for the tardy youngster to do his chores — of bringing in the wood for the big open fires, and of feeding the pigs with the half-frozen pumpkin which he has but a few moments before chopped atop the wooden bench with its four flaring legs, its long, unwieldy blade hung at one end to a link and swivel, its haft surmounted with a handle not less unwieldy than the blade itself. Cutting pumpkins for the pigs and cattle, in those days, was one of the preliminaries to the enjoyment of the bowl of bread or hominy and milk which came after the driving of the cows to the rude comfort and fragrant mows of the home-barn. How I

pitied the less fortunate herds in a neighboring pasture, closely huddled together for warmth and company, in the lee of the sprawling stump fence, its ragged drapery of pines and spruces at the lower corner of the hill-slope but illy drawn together, — no doubt, wondering why the farmer did not come for them. I remember these spruces well, for no more famous breeding-places than these self-same pines and spruces — with their sprinkling of poplars, spare-limbed and silver-leaved — could be recalled for the flocks of partridges that bred so abundantly throughout these lowland woods; but these meek, expectant-eyed cattle will make their owner pay for this neglect, when they get their mottled noses into his stacks of herd-grass and redtop, with their eager appetites never whetted to a sharper edge. A few days of cold and exposure in November costs pounds of pasture-fed flesh, but I have noticed that some farmers never take their cattle home for the winter until the first snow brings its chill warning. How forgetful some people are of the comfort of their dependents, if their own shins are but comfortably toasted, and their own tables abundantly spread!

How the acorns and beech-nuts rattle down upon the leaf-strewn floors of the woods, these gray days! The cows scuff through wind-piled windrows of yellow foliage with quickened steps as they go up out of the beeches into the open

lands where the thorn-trees blush crimson with their ripened berries, homeward ho! The arrant, thieving jays cry, "Shame! Shame!" after them, no doubt filled with jealous envy as they think of the nubbins of succulent corn, fresh from the husking pile in the big floors, which await the cattle at their tie-up. The jay is a beautiful fellow in his suit of azure, black, and white, but I have a very poor opinion of him, as I have of his prototype in human guise. I have not much of an opinion of mean people, whatever they may wear.

Not a few days in this month of frozen roads with deepened, thick-ribbed ruts, with here and there a pool of ice by the wayside, the farmer marks as weather-breeders, and what delusive days they are! The morning comes in warm, and the last of the cabbages and turnips are housed. A mild haze backs up against the sun. The temperature is slowly falling, and the air is "full of snow," so the farmer says; but, wait patiently as we may for the first spit of snow, the snowfall does not come. Down goes the mercury in the thermometer hung just outside the porch-door, and the cows linger in an aimless, discontented manner about the bars by the roadside. As the afternoon wanes the sky slowly changes. The southwest is piled deep with clouds that look like the broken furrows of newly ploughed lands. The landscape grows duller, darker, and more chilly.

The gray phantoms of the olden forest, the century-old stumps in the silent pastures, loom up like ghosts among the outcropping ledges, and along the margin of the woodland below the old barns. The low, black roof of the ancient farm-house is blacker yet under its shelter of overarching elms. Under a lustreless mass of cloud, clear-cut and brilliantly outlined, the long, slender bar of crimson gold, stretched clear across the west, has grown narrow and narrower still, until upper and nether cloud-rim have touched each other, and the day is utterly shut out. But what promise lay within the molten sea that had so soon ebbed away, and what a picture this bit of accentuated color against its background of neutral tones, above, below, bursting its dykes of far-away mountain-tops, and flooding the world with a moment of golden glory, makes upon the memory! Years may come and go, but the recollection of sunsets like this never fades. It is a poem in color, or rather like a perfect chord in music. It is enough to watch those far-off altars of the dying day in silence. They speak a language to the soul that human lips are not able to interpret, for there are deeps to the heart that the sounding-line of speech has never fathomed. The eye is the only interpreter of a great passion, and Nature is Passion itself. But the misty flocks of the sky have been driven to their mountain-pastures; a random

flake of snow strikes the cheek; one by one the lights come out along the old country-road, and across the valley; the dusk is turned into night, and the bright hearth-fire is all there is to remind one of the brilliant sunset glow. The cricket chirps a nocturne, with many a quaver, rest, and broken strain among his quaintly pitched notes; the candles sputter as they get lower down in their brazen sockets, smoking and flaring with every gust of wind against the ill-fitting sash of the windows, loose and worn as all old things are. It is a weird, lonesome sound, this creak and rattle of the house-windows, and makes one think of spooks and ghost-stories by the bookful.

Old Salem comes to mind, with

> Its wizards and its witches,
> Withered, toothless, crone and hag,
> Who to tryst in Parris' pasture
> Went astride of broom-stick nag,
>
> When the winds round roof and gable
> With ghostly utterance blew,
> And the shutters creaked and shuddered
> At the howl of goblin crew,
> And the children hid and cowered
> Beside Good-wife in affright,
> While full of prayer the Good-man stirred
> The hearth-fire's smouldering light.

There is strange, rhythmic cadence running through these noises made by the wind-sprites,

and even the house-cat grows restless with the increasing commotion, wandering about with stealthy tread, with the fur along her spine and tail all "on end," and eyes that glow like emeralds from the shadows in the farther corners of the big room; but the fire burns more brightly, and the blaze leaps higher yet up the broad flue of the chimney. The old square corn-popper is brought from its obscurity of wooden peg in the garret stairway; and with a tress of well seasoned corn from the rafters over the old kitchen, and the music of their kernels bursting into snow-white bloom, the outer world is forgotten.

With the innocent diversion of such books, well thumbed already, as filled the shelves of the little oak-grained cupboard of pine, dark and smoke-stained, and that kept the clock silent but congenial company, the evening went swiftly by. It was a sober enough sort of existence, for the entire household maintained the strictest orthodoxy that Andover might prescribe. But firelit evenings come to an end, as all else, and, with the warning stroke of nine, the boys set their chairs against the wall with its oddly figured paper, whereon are portrayed Chinese junks with impossible lateen sails, tall pagodas with tapering roofs and huge flights of winding stairs, the whole combination unequalled in its quaint style and sombre aspect by any mural designer of nowadays, and,

with a short climb up the creaky backstairs, a look at the starlit sky, the youngsters are asleep.

The next morning dawns bright and clear, with strengthening cold, and the snow-storm prophesied the day before is as far away as ever. The farmer reckoned without the morrow. The snow does not come for days, but the roads grow smoother with the warmth of the mid-day sun and the going to and fro of heavy teams. The weather clerk has made a diversion in favor of the boys, while the lumbermen fret and growl at their idle oxen and the poverty-stricken skies, for lumbermen must needs have deeps of snow for their creaking sleds.

The boys scamper for the flooded lowlands with their clumsy skates, that have more of wood and leather about them than steel or iron, for the ponds were rarely frozen over until long after the first snows. What hilarious troops of boys went hurrying over the pasture-walls and down through the scented ferns. Rare pleasures those little episodes were among the tufts of brown tussock sedge and swamp-alders, with their windings, twistings, and turnings, in and out, up, down, and across, with only the cheery snow-bunting for company.

But there come two or three days of intense, stinging cold, that

> "No coat, however stout,
> Of homespun stuff could quite shut out,"—

still, windless days. On this last day, by noon, the weather begins to moderate, and along the edge of the southern horizon is stretched a ribbon of ashen-colored cloud. A "snow-bank," the weather-wise calls it.

Thanksgiving day comes this week, and without a sleigh-ride half its old-time pleasure will be missing; but the cloud is one of Nature's tell-tales. The old yellow sleigh, with its big wooden runners and peaked dasher, and high square back adorned with rudely painted coat-of-arms, and its ancient date, will be unslung from the cobwebs that drape the sagging beams of the wagon-house, its faded cushion of Turkey red redolent with the aroma of the well filled apple-bins below.

What a commotion this launching of the sleigh will make among the bees in their warm hives at its farther end, as Queen Buzz calls her council together, with quaking hearts, to debate upon the cause of this unseemly disturbance; but it will be a fruitless discussion, for there is but one avenue out of her dominions, and that into the frosty air of the orchard, into which her most hardy scouts can venture only at their utmost peril; but men have been known to do as foolish things as did ever the Knights of Queen Buzz, though they are hardly ever so busy. What dainty workers these bees are we shall know on the morrow, as the hives are rarely ever disturbed before this old-fashioned

festival is inaugurated, among the late November days, when the sweets of the red clover-blossom and fragrant honeysuckle will be added to the wonderful mysteries of the kitchen that fill the unwritten menu that has made New England famous for her autumn feast, and which would be incomplete without this pastoral of the humble honey-gatherer with pollen-dusted wings and glint of summer sunshine and hint of meadow-bloom. Oh, the royal mission of the bee! What pictures of sloping field and breezy upland, of summer lights and shadows and wilding flower, hide within the hexagons of transparent wax within which he stores his royal treasure!

"Snow to-morrow!" This time the farmer's prophecy is an inspired one, and what dazzling visions of snow-covered field and wood greet our youngsterhood, from the dimmed panes of our window in the roadside gable, with the next dawn! What a halo of utter whiteness lies spread out under the morning sun! A veil of shimmering beauty lies over fence and highway, brown and unkempt yesterday, but to-day hidden under a mantle like the softest of swan's-down. Yesterday spoke only of harsh lines, of sharp angles, and rugged, wind-blown, leafless trees, of sombre tones and shadows, but to-day the world is made glorious with the first deep snow of the growing winter. The stealthily coming, noiselessly falling

snow! A rare, dainty footstep has this messenger of the Northland; a royal ambassador is he, with such an army in his train. A greater than Merlin, the King of Enchanters, hath done this; and what keen, life-giving, delicious atmosphere, what pulsating of blood-currents, what new bonds of strength, hath Earth stolen from the Wizard's robes! It is a new earth indeed that young Winter has brought in a single night, with hosts of new hopes and pleasures. It is the most brilliant of Nature's transformation scenes, of which she has many. Nature is a master stage-setter, rich in expedients, fertile in conception, never disappointing her audiences, never guilty of tiresome repetition, but riant with color and passion and music. What a grand orchestra Nature provides for her Winter plays! It is the Music of the Immortals.

It is a short breakfast this morning, I assure you, and it is with unspeakable delight the broad-bladed snow-shovels, hunted up the day before, are brought out to clear the paths here and there about the farm-house yard; first, to the old, faded-out doors — once painted red — of the wagon-house, which was then an important annex of the larger hog-house, the scene already of much clamorous squealing and grunting for the morning meal of pumpkin and boiled potato mush on the part of its swinish dwellers, all unconscious of the

premeditated visit of the professional "butcher" of the neighborhood on one of these bright winter mornings; and then to the barn, where Chanticleer is holding high carnival with his excited flock. How clearly rang out his shrilly pitched, clarion notes, to lose themselves among the pines beyond the blueberry pasture, in a medley of echoes, each one as clearly cut and incisive as the glittering snow-crystals over which the homely sound floated. A clumsy, boisterous flight, and this Lord of the Roost has gained the highest gable on the barn, from whence he shouts a pæan of conceit to the farm-houses up and down the valley,— a lordly challenge, to be sure, and one that brings swift answer, sharp and irate enough, from one of similar ilk. Below, the admiring hens flounder about the snowy deeps, not forgetting, in their pride, to indulge in a homely *cadenza* of approving clucks and cackling cachinnations at the daring spirit of the young Knight of Roosterhood. The Sir Knight went to market yesterday, so the harem has a new master, and I really believe these addle-pated hens are delighted.

But the spell of enchantment has departed from our shovels ere half the work is done. Mittens are wringing wet, and the snow has grown heavy. The path to the barns seemed never so long before. Whizz-z-z! and a snowball comes flying through the air; the aching back is forgotten,

and the snowy missiles come and go until, almost out of breath with our pelting of each other, by one unlucky aim, the pantry window proves the better target, and *smash* goes a snowball clean through a single pane and over the sanded floor, leaving its trail of recent disaster, with many a tell-tale mark, upon the drift-piled window-sill. I do not pity my mate in his misfortune, for he is a larger boy, by three years, and apt to domineer at times; nor are his snowballs or his ways savored with gentleness. If somewhat coarse and rude, he is a fairly good fellow; if an unconscionable shirk about the farm, he is an adept at trouting and snaring rabbits and partridges. I learned more of the world's doubtful philosophies from him than my mother dreamed existed in a boy's mind, of those days; but the accident recalls us to the work of clearing the paths to the barns, nor are our minds idle as we await, with silent trepidation, the sharp reproof that, we feel, is hanging over our heads, and that will be visited upon the culprits, when some household errand impels mother to the scene of her disturbed milk-pans and yellow cheese shelves. We are, no doubt, in disgrace for the whole day, for a grieved look in mother's brown eyes hurts more than open rebuke; and as for my father, I dreaded his puritanic severity, which, not often, but sometimes, found expression in what he considered wholesome

chastisement. "Spare the rod and spoil the child" is one of the essentials in his rugged creed; and the rod, in his hand, is conscientiously a rod of correction. For all that, he is a magnificently just man, with big, generous heart, and scrupulously honest to his neighbor as to himself, administering punishment, when it is needful, from a sense of duty alone. I am afraid the victim too often harbored in his heart the opposite of repentance.

I do not believe in punishing children in fault unwittingly, perhaps, but never when the downright evil intent is absent as an element in the misdemeanor. Corporal punishment for childish misdemeanors is a mistaken idea, morally wrong, and oftentimes almost criminal where such retribution is tinged with the slightest coloring of ill concealed vexation, and really so where there is an intemperate display of irritation. Children reason with ready intellects, and resent the infliction of pain with many an unspoken anathema of smothered anger. To whip and torture is a brutish custom, the relic of a barbarity that finds no excuse for its existence in modern civilization, and of an age when men found no better pastime than the whipping of helpless women into subjection. It is gratifying to know that in all the advanced systems of public instruction this idea is accepted and adopted as a part of the written

code ; but, in those days of which I write, retribution followed swiftly upon the discovery of wrong-doing, as the outcome of the religious training of the times.

The doctrine of eternal punishment was a familiar one in the household ; it was the ogre of my boyhood, dogging my footsteps from the hour of my waking to when

> "The bull's-eye watch that hung in view,"

upon its nail above the narrow mantel, perched high up in the huge jamb of the old-fashioned fire-place,

> "Ticking its weary circuit through,
> Pointed with mutely warning sign
> Its black hand to the hour of nine,"—

nor even then did the sleuth-hound of this morbid fear depart. Never was there a theologic discussion indulged in beside the broad hearth, and there were many, but across its broadest thought could be traced, in lurid lines, the terrors of bottomless pits and lakes of liquid fire for erring humanity, while heaven was the blest retreat —

> "Where Sabbaths never end" —

for the *predestined* and *elect ;* but who were the elect, seemed ever the uppermost and troublous question. It was an unsatisfactory ending that came with every closing argument, *pro* or *con.* The Devil lurked behind a host of innocent diversions,

ready to entrap the unwary; nor was it hardly safe to think, for he who had a thought the fulfilment of which was error and wickedness was, by the creed, as much damned as he who sinned in deed. It was certainly a narrow, uncomfortable state of mind for a juvenile to be in, and it is no wonder that children grew fearful of their own shadows after nightfall, and plunged their heads beneath their pillows at bed-time, to escape possible visions of "bogies" and the "black-man" the Devil was like to send to them.

The world of religious thought may be no wiser, but it is vastly more lenient and better now than then; and if men will engage in acrid controversy over old forms of religious beliefs, forgetful in part of the real essentials of true Christian living, there are those who realize that the real fruitage of human endeavor is gathered day by day, and whose creed consists in living the true life to-day, and letting the morrow take care of itself. The Maker of so beautiful a world is more a being of infinite love, mercy, and forgiveness than narrow-minded sect has yet realized. God knows no sect, no controversy. "Except ye be as little children" means more than dogma or creed; and if children are winning more consideration, are being taught to get the most they can out of child-life, the future is one of great promise, with the only danger impending of too much child-

wisdom and precocity. Childish instincts are seldom at fault. Nature is a generous tutor, and, with a few judicious aids at the hands of humanity, a safe one.

As to the broken window in the pantry, if there was ever a discovery of our folly, nothing was said of it then or ever afterward, though the day was well through before our consciences were eased to any degree, or our fears abated, but even they did not retard our sport or dampen our enthusiasm at being a part of this

"... universe of sky and snow,"—

and which Whittier has, with loving, tender touch, made idyllic, throwing about the homely country, home the rarest of reminiscent charm. We saw with him

"The old familiar sights of ours,"—

and which, under the spell of the Magician of the Snow, had been metamorphosed into

"Marvellous shapes: strange domes and towers
Rose up where sty or corn-crib stood,
Or garden-wall, or belt of wood;
A smooth, white mound the brush-pile showed,
A fenceless drift what once was road;
The bridle-post an old man sat
With loose-flung coat and high cocked hat:
The well-curb had a Chinese roof;
And even the long sweep, high aloof,
In its slant splendor seemed to tell
Of Pisa's leaning miracle."

The broad roofs of the barns, built over two generations ago, their shingles of yellow-hearted *pumpkin*-pine. half as ancient, and that were riven by hand, one at a time, down in the old meadow-lot, gray with moss, sombre-hued, worn thin and deeply furrowed with many a pelting of equinoctial storm, shrunken and creviced by one midsummer drought after another, are glorified in their panoply of white, and radiantly beautiful in the sunshine of this bright morning, with every snow-crystal a jewel set amid a glittering host of its fellows. The northward-looking gables are frescoed with countless frosty pellicles, and are draped with cloth of rarest silver. The farm-house chimneys, ruddy-colored and dusky-mounted, are the more suggestive of comfort as they peer over the snow-capped ridge-pole, their blue smokes scarcely less blue than the cloudless sky. The pasture-birches are bent double under the common burden of winter, their level acres of branch and twig blended and interlaced with all of Nature's intricate cunning, a sea of frozen tracery lying marvellously still under the beetling cliffs of snow-laden pines at their farther margin, while eastward the hill-slopes rise like huge dunes, white and treeless. South and west, below the trough of the highway, trackless as yet, the lowlands reach away beyond the orchards, into seemingly illimitable forests. It is a most fascinating picture, with more of splendor

than lives in the wonderful tales of any imaginary story-teller. It is a real fairy-land, with hosts of winged sprites, viewless and unseen, hiding in every nook and cranny of fence and wall and shadowy woodland. What a still, windless morning! The air is palpitating with new life and exhilaration. How different from the witchery of June, and yet not less delightful, this vision of spotless purity! Not a breath of wind, not a sound of earth, mars our transport of feeling, and it were not hard to imagine the music of the spheres, in the deep silence. Such a day as this impels me to believe that there is such a thing as the music of silence, audible only to the soul, and blessed is he who may fall within the spell of such glorious harmonies as the Supernal Composer has written within this snow-bound manuscript of Nature. What a sense of the utter grossness of humanity comes over one in the midst of such immaculateness of earth! Moreover, what a comforting thought that humanity shall be purged of its uncleanliness, to be clothed likewise, with immaculate purity! One must needs be soulless who is not stirred to the depths, whose heart does not follow with rhythmic beat the spirit-songs of Winter's new-born loveliness. It is Beauty snow-bound.

But our scant breakfast has left us hungry after our task, and down we go through the long well-room, stamping the snow from our thick boots of

domestic cowhide on the way. How eagerly we drink of the brimming bucket that hangs at the top of the curb every day in the year! Slowly the box of stone ballast in the corner of the high curb goes up, as hand over hand the stout bucket of oak, with swivelled iron bail and chain, is lowered into the deeps of the well, while I sing the refrain, —

"Round like an apple,
Deep like a cup;
All the King's oxen
Can't pull it up," —

and with what wheezy, creaking song of complaining the big wooden wheel overhead pulls its sparkling, dripping burden to the icy shelf, as the ballast swiftly returns to its resting-place with a dull thud, as if of satisfaction that its labor is so soon over! Hosts of rare memories cluster about this old-fashioned curb — memories of the gray stone jug, with its spray of four-leaved clover painted in blue upon its side, with just a glimmer of summer sunshine flashing from its gray glazing, that has scraped the acquaintance of many a fragrant hay-cock or bunch of new-mown clover. What rhymes, learned of the rustling corn-leaves on the uplands, or of the bearded rye hidden in the shadows of the blackened stumps in the old rick by the woods, has it repeated to me, as its waters, with many a soft-

voiced gurgle and airy bubble, found their way into its unrevealed recesses through the old tin tunnel! Not the less delicious was the coolness that came with the application of its soft waters to my face, hot and dusty from the glaring heats of the hay-field, than was the ruddy glow healthful it left upon my cheek of a cold, stinging morning. It may not have been the *elixir vitæ*, which has baffled the search of more than one deluded alchemist; but that it possessed the balm of health-giving, rare and rugged, I have never doubted. It is only at long intervals, in these later years, that I may look into its dusky mirror, o'er the self-same curb of boyhood: the old boy-face is gone, and another has taken its place; but a drink of its sparkling nectar, from its northern-most corner, is pleasure unalloyed. Oh, the magic of such memories!

A hearty drink after shovelling the paths is but an appetizing preliminary to the lunch of doughnuts and real country-cheese, colored with here and there a petal of yellow marigold, but barely touched and rarely flavored with a bit of greenish mould, with its dessert of ruddy-cheeked Nodhead, the rarest of all rare fall apples. How we watch for the first sleigh down the hill, or from over the knoll beyond the old well-sweep, forsaken now for the newer well at the house! How the fire crackles and roars in the huge brick oven, as if

full of glee that its simmering heats are so soon to transmute the concoctions of the kitchen into the most famous repast of the whole year! But hark! — sleigh-bells, sure enough, and we rush to the door in time to greet our nearest neighbor, who has taken an early start to church on the hill, with the query, "How's the slippin'?"

"Fust-rate, fust-rate. The snow's come damp, and treads tip-top. Goin' to meetin', ain't yer? S'pose yer know the old pa'son's ter preach the Thanksgivin' sarmon."

With a mysteriously evolved cluck, our neighbor had whipped up, and was off on his four-mile journey, whither father and myself are to follow later.

The Governor's proclamation had been read from the pulpit the preceding Sabbath, and the appointment for the usual church-service had been made; but we did not know that our old pastor, who had been retired a half-decade in favor of a younger man, was to occupy the pulpit, — and what a pulpit it was! But the oven was raked clear of its blazing sticks, and the ruddy coals, which were deposited in the fireplace adjacent, where they were left to cool, and fade out into dusky bits of carbon, while mother dressed me for church, completing the operation with the pinning-on of a linen collar, so stiff with starch that it seemed more an instrument of torture and utter

discomfort than anything which gave to my outfit an added comeliness. I have no doubt that with my wide-flaring collar, and which obliged me to carry my head with much circumspection if I wished to take any comfort at all, and my oddly fashioned clothing, I looked the prim little Puritan to perfection.

Meanwhile, the antiquated sleigh, with back high enough to hide its occupants from all observation from behind, and which looked oddly out of date forty years ago, though at one time the pride of the town aristocracy, consorting bravely with wig, and perchance three-cornered hat, with knee-buckles of silver and brilliantly colored waistcoat, and preserving its caste more by its aspect of severe discomfort and sharp angularity than by any inherent quality of grace or beauty which one might discover in its plain, box-like body, its clumsy runners low-down and stub-nosed, with thills long and straight, had been unslung from its summer moorings, and was already at the door. Fine clothes were not much thought of in those times. If what was worn was only neat and cleanly, and, if patched, if the patching was skilfully done, it did not matter, so long as it was known that the wearer had a "Sunday-go-to-meetin' suit" hung carefully away in the cedar closet of the old farm-house for funerals and extra solemn occasions. This suit was most generally of black

broadcloth or doeskin, and which, donned for any special occasion, looked as if it were made for some other person than the wearer. The style was always more or less of the nondescript order; but what did that matter, with such rugged manhood as theirs! Dollars counted for more than dress, as they always have. It took but a moment for father to put on his tall dickey and black silk stock, and somewhat faded blue surtout, which was a part of his wedding outfit, in all of which operations mother lent her welcome assistance, with many an expression of solicitude and wifely pride. Donning his silk stove-pipe hat, which was of ample dimensions, and about my own age, if family chronicles are to be relied upon, and over all his wolfskin overcoat, we were soon on our way to the old white church. Judge, the family horse, evidently well aware of his destination, comported himself with rare dignity on church-days, though at other times he was wont to be more or less restive under the harness. His rich bay color, and silver mane and tail, long and glossy, bespoke his Morgan ancestry, sadly groomed as he was for the most part of the time; but we were great friends, as many a bareback ride and pasture canter could testify. I always enjoyed the ride over the hills, through the fresh mountain-air, snugly tucked about with warm buffalo-robes, that smelled of camphor and careful housing, as from every hill-

top new visions of loveliness came and went in slow succession.

The old church-bell rings out with staid yet cheery welcome as we mount the last hill, and what a transition from the brilliance and sparkle of the snow-covered landscape without to the sombre plainness and narrow, high-backed pews within the church. From the little square pulpit, perched upon the top of a lofty dais, with its steep flight of steps on either side, the minister looked out over the silver rims of his ancient spectacles, for a moment, upon his audience, and through the silence I could hear the brisk crackle of the burning wood in the big air-tight stoves by the doors that opened into the church directly under the singing-seats; and from the long rusty funnels that ran the whole length of the church, and that were suspended from the ceiling just over the two broad aisles, came puffs of transparent blue smoke, that made the air pungent to nose and eye, until the people, with sundry nods and winks to the deacons, had forced one of these slow but worthy functionaries to lower the top sash of the window over some unoccupied wing-pews. Then came a brief invocation, then the reading of the opening hymn, which was sung, with lusty vigor of high-pitched treble and rugged bass, by "y^{e} big choir;" after which a selection of Scripture was read, with trembling earnestness of voice, not ill befitting the

gray-haired man of eighty or more. The "long prayer" followed, which, breathing of rare trust and devotion, was of interminable length, and I wondered, with a boy's mind, whether God heard all he said. With what pride and dignity was the broadly folded sheet, whereon was printed the proclamation of the Governor, unfolded and read after the singing of the second hymn, to be supplemented at its close with the pious, "God save the State of ———!"

How vividly came to mind the staid, sober people of Plymouth wending their way to their rude log-church, with brave Captain Standish at their head, all keeping step to the beat of the drum, with Governor Bradford and William Brewster next, and then the settlers in their order, and not alone; for Massasoit was there with his Indian braves to invoke the blessing of Almighty upon this first Thanksgiving festival, which was prolonged for the space of three days, the origin of this beautiful New England custom. But what a sermon followed, near two good hours in length!— But the people were delighted, and the entire congregation joined in the closing hymn, — "Lord, dismiss us with thy blessing."

What an outburst of sound it was that preceded that benediction, the last the old man ever uttered, with hands outspread above his congregation! I remember, as my father went to him with heart-felt

greeting after the service, how he placed a trembling hand upon my head, with the wish that I might be as good a man as my father. What simple times those were! It is with a rare pleasure that I meet with anything which possesses a hint of the homely sincerity, the rare unselfishness, and humble living, that make

"These Flemish pictures of old days"

so delightful to recall.

II.

The Thanksgiving dinner in New England is an occasion of rare and long anticipated pleasure, occurring, as it does, during that interregnum of almost enforced idleness among the distinctively farming people. Of all lasting pleasures, I have found those of a rural character are to be counted first and chiefest. It may be because they appeal to me more strongly, or arouse larger sympathies; but I find great charm in their simplicity as well. They do not ask any return; they require no outlay in advance, nor do their fullest enjoyments impose any penalty of weariness or debilitation, but they are rather an antidote to such. The true farmer is one of Nature's children, and, broad-chested and brawny as he is, overbrimming with the richest sort of vitality, as his independent way

of living and out-of-door pursuits must needs make him, he is none the less keen in every manly sensibility, none the less clear in his reasoning or the less quick in his instincts. The coarser the covering to the nut, the sweeter the meat, and a homespun garb more often hides a big heart and a clear intellect than not.

Reasoning from natural phenomena is the road over which common-sense rides from a lower plane to a higher. The greater the fund of common-sense, the more happiness there is in life, however simple it may be, for its possessor. Nature is the great tonic, full of sparkling, exhilarating quality from ruddy sunrise to ruddier sunset. Farm-life is of great variety, and not at all the humdrum sort of an existence it is thought, by some, to be. Who ever heard of a farmer to the manor born, or his thrifty housewife being troubled with the fashionably termed *ennui*, the disease of idleness? There is neither time nor disposition to indulge in splenetic complaints, in this mixture of out-door and in-door life, every moment of which is pulsating with robust exhilaration, whether it is in the searching after and the plucking of the sweet-smelling arbutus-blossom among the low evergreens in the pastures, with the maples showering down upon you their blood-stained flowers with every vibration of the atmosphere, the driving of the team afield with plough

or harrow, or the scattering of the grain across the mellow last-year's corn-lands; the spring days are overflowing with a freshness and promise and bursting beauty that ever lie within the rarer enjoyments of anticipation, — anticipation that is richest in its fulfilment.

June blossoms into the wanton luxuriance of the riper summer days, to fade away, almost imperceptibly, into the nut-brown days of October, the season of falling leaves and garish woodlands, when Nature has come to one of her resting-places, and when, to the dwellers in the old farm-house, the summer work and harvesting is completed. These days are the breathing-spaces for the farm-folks, young and old, with their short allowance of sunshine and long, fire-lighted evenings, interspersed with many a neighborly visit; with their gatherings at the cross-roads post-office for the mail, which always comes with the thickening shadows, that follow the sundown so swiftly, and where, with the innocent but Yankee-like diversion of whittling at box or bench, with neighborly gossip amid clouds of pipe-smoke, and with the reading aloud, by some prodigy of the "deestrick school," of the single copy of the daily paper, which the village squire or some local politician feels it his duty to provide for his constituency, the evening is fairly well spent.

Thanksgiving day is a long anticipated occasion

of festivity. The poultry are sedulously watched and fed, those of rufous plumage being especially devoted to the executioner and market-man, with some of the older "fry" among the Cochins, Brahmas, and Plymouth Rocks; the largest, fairest fruits from the orchards are selected for its desserts; the sage and mint for the stuffing of the big turkey are picked in blossoming time, and carefully laid away beyond the touch of profane hand; there are mysterious errands to the "corner grocery," and many a brown-paper parcel was smuggled into the house-pantry; nothing was forgotten, not even the powder and shot for the old Queen's-arm musket was overlooked, with which to shoot the partridges and squirrels for the pot-pie, which was always set upon the table in the big ten-quart tin pan in which it was baked, its top-crust rising like a dome from its flaring rim, delicately browned, and flaky as only mother knew how to make it. The hard, puckery fruit from the native pear-tree, that grew in the gap in the pasture-fence, already of uncertain age, has been preserved in the best Cienfuegos, and the new cider has been boiled to the proper consistency and flavor for sauce of quartered sugar-sweetings, that hung all summer long over the wood-pile behind the shed, to drop one by one, through the mellow haze of the short October afternoons, into the *débris* of dead thistles and beechen chips below,

with many a cut and bruise upon their golden rinds. It was a rare relish, and took the place of the cranberry, for there was not a cranberry-bog within fifteen miles of the home-farm.

The ground under the butternut-trees has been scoured for the twentieth time, in search of the stray, late fallen nuts, with their green-hued, sticky rinds. The long, oval-shaped butternut-leaves have fallen long since, but some of the nuts are obstinate enough, and mind neither wind nor rain, and only a sturdy climb and persistent clubbing of the farthermost branches will dislodge them from their lofty perch, but all the more tempting to our boyish effort; but the nuts are beaten off or shaken to the ground, and down I slide to the foot of the tree, to find, how provoking! that, with all my agility and lynx-eyed peering about the leafless branches, I had missed a half-score of them. What a taunting air those few odd butternuts on the topmost twigs had, as if they were saying, "Come and get me if you dare!" I let them remain, well satisfied that Jack Frost would knock them off if I did not. There were no shagbarks on the home-lot, though I knew of some on a neighboring farm, but which were preëmpted by their owners, for home-consumption; but mother and I have raked the beechen carpetings of the woods by the square rod, with our nimble fingers, in company with the squirrels, red and gray, and

as well the half-crazy chipmonk, who always blew a shrill whistle whenever he was excited or alarmed, dodging for the nearest hole as if his life depended upon the rapidity of his exertion.

The chipmonk is an easily domesticated fellow, running about the house with the utmost freedom, upstairs and down ; making cosey nests out of the window-draperies, rustling with a busy sort of noise about the paper-basket, now upon the top of the easy-chair, and now in the corner, munching at a nut he has been fortunate enough to discover about the pantry. How many snares the little fellow escaped before he fell into my own I do not know, but one bright, sunny day in the early fall some one about the house left the outer door ajar, and Mr. Chipmonk left most unceremoniously, and from that day to this I have not seen him to recognize him, but I rather liked his independence and spirit. To be under the slightest obligation to some people is certainly very uncomfortable, not to say downright disagreeable ; and yet as I recall the chipmonk's sharp whistle he was constantly saying, " Let me go ! let me go ! I say, siree, let me go ! " between his chattering teeth. We were not a little entertained by the acrobatic exhibitions, given from time to time, through the bright days we frequented the woods, by the big gray squirrels, that made their highways among the interlacing hemlock-tops, with

many a sharp bark and daring leap. But they were more shy than the smaller species, and less numerous. We would meet them in the late afternoon, racing down over the pasture into the woods, with a load of corn stolen from the uncut harvest on the hill-side. They came even into the corn-crib in the deep of winter, and, for all I know, slept there; but these forest-children did not interfere much with our beech-nutting, as the ample salt-bag hanging from the drying-pole in the kitchen abundantly proved. What magnificent days came with every frosty morning! Each day was a huge topaz set with bright, starlit nights flooded with all the glory of the harvest-moon. But the husbandman has not been idle. There has been no lagging about the farm since the boys began to pull and stack the beans in the corn, binding the stakes at the bottom with the slender withes of witch-hazel, with green-stained, roughened hands, but the tops were always finished by father.

The potato-vines have grown rusty lying so long in the summer sun, and at last, dead and dry, are pulled from the long, parallel ridges of mellowed soil, and with bright-bladed hoe the white and purple tubers are thrown out to dry before being carted to the cellar and piled away beneath the stone arches that hold up the big, wide hearth, with its heavy chimney-stack. The corn-crop has

been gathered into the husking-pile and deftly stripped of its yellow sheaths and brown silks, and has been carried in baskets to the corn-loft in the long attic of the woodshed, for the vagrant mice to feed upon the winter through. The silver-skins in the onion-patch have been pulled and carted with the other field-produce into the cellar, to keep company with the potatoes, and where there are also ample bins of rutabagas and Dutch cabbages dressed in royal purple, with blood-red beets in quantities for the housewife, and where there are bushels of carrots, long and tapering, each one an ingot of ruddy gold, for the calves, and an occasional boiled dinner of country-pork or well salted beef. In the apple-room, in the southerly corner, are bushels upon bushels of apples, piled high against its four walls, and which bespeak ample store for winter days. The threshers have made their annual pilgrimage, and the sun-blackened beans, dumped from the old ox-cart into the barn-floors, have been beaten into sheer chaff by the farm-hands, with their old-fashioned, hollow-sounding flails, and afterward winnowed in the wind, or blown clean in the ancient, yellow winnowing-machine, — and a queer bit of farm-mechanism it was, with its immense hopper and wooden wheel with white-oak pin driven squarely into its outer side, and a clumsy crank-pin it was, with channelled rim for the leather band that

drove the blower! As wheezy and full of clatter as any old-fashioned thing could be, we children thought it a wonderful plaything, catching in our hands the snowy white treasure as it came pouring down the little spout on the side where the wheels, with their attachment of slender wooden bar, were jerking the sieves rapidly to one side and the other.

Rare dreams of childish romance filled our thought as we caught an imaginary glimpse of Jack the Giant-killer, hovering in the thick dust of pod and stalk, gathering in an ever-increasing pile, to be scattered by father's thick leathern boots over the floor, when its accumulation interfered with the sieves. Many a song was evolved from the whir of the blower, and written upon an imaginary staff in the heart, to be sung in the silence of after years; and what sweet pastorals they were! The cattle thought these broken pods delicious, as I imagined from their eager snuffing and hungry looks whenever a bunch of beanstalks came in their way, and the sheep munched away at them as busily as if it were the last "foddering" from the scaffold. I delighted in the "foddering" of these barn-people whenever I went among them, and if I did not give them something good from the mows, the "mild reproach" that looked from their wide-open, ruminant eyes kept even pace with me up the hill to the house.

The hollowed pathways of the mower across the wheat-field have been marked with many a parallel track, left by the broadly tired wheels of the ox-cart, and gleaned bare of stones, which have been built into substantial cobble-wall about the farm, preparatory to the mowing of the rank clover which will spring up next year. A good solid wall is the pride of the thrifty farmer, and a most excellent barrier against invasion from the cattle of a not over-solicitous neighbor: but cattle are half-human in their inclinations to indulge in mischief, and no more innocent-looking culprit can be conceived than one of these adepts at jumping stone walls and tearing-down of fences. The cornfield or clover-patch on the other side of the fence are covered with tempting sweetness, and I doubt if ever human heart swelled with more passionate desire to revel in forbidden pleasures than that of a certain steer once appurtenant to the farm domain, and to whom the jumping of a five-rail fence was mere pastime. For a bovine vaulter he was unexcelled in daring and agility; for, blind him as you would, with the wooden placard of his thieving disposition, the broad strip of pine board across his forehead, and lash it with stoutly knotted thongs to his ample horns, the result was much the same. A toss of the head, and up would go the "blind" for a few seconds. The swift survey is followed by a leap

as graceful as that of a deer; down he alights in the rank corn or blossoming clover, to feed at his leisure, to return to the pasture later, by the way of his coming, if, perchance, he be not discovered, the envy and admiration of the herd.

The expiation of his agrarian crime is something of which he is utterly unmindful; so, after a too frequent indulgence in this seductive and adventurous sport, he is caught in the act, and, without the formality of a hearing, condemned to a solitary confinement in the deserted tie-up until the time of his execution, with only the musty memories of its winter-crowded stanchions to keep him company, and without the possibility of a merciful reprieve from the hungry maw of the family beef-barrel, now hidden within the damp mould and sinister shadows of the cellar-stairs; but with how much or how little justice, no one stops to question — there is no mercy for a thieving animal, in the otherwise generous heart of the farmer. A cattle jury would, no doubt, acquit the prisoner without leaving the panel, in disregard of all human precedent, — I am inclined to think such a verdict would be a righteous one, — heavily taxed as they are by one sort of an impost after another, by farm-hand and dairy-maid, especially were all culprits as noble-looking and handsome as this Duke of Hereford, whose death was so ignominious.

The few acres of pasture-sward, fragrant with the low shrubbery of the sweet-fern, and odorous with scents of the humble pennyroyal, have been turned over for the spring sowing of oats. The huge breaking-up plough and its four oxen plodding with slow, steady movement along the crest of the pasture-knoll, sturdily yet sharply outlined against the low horizon of the sky, which makes the soft gray background, is a picture from the life, crisp and sketchy enough to attract the brush of a Landseer or a Bonheur, and overbrimming with values that have no approximate in art. It is a rare pleasure to follow with loitering footsteps after the ploughman. What a lazy pace it is! but here is Strength. There is a picturesque touch to everything, even to the flapping of the loose sleeves of the farmer's cottonade shirt, as the breeze livens up a bit; and the old, sun-browned felt hat, with its broad, flexible brim, blown stiffly up with every windy gust that sweeps over the slope, adds but another to the quaint characteristics of this pastoral episode of the late fall days. How evenly the sward is cut, and folded over against the edge of its neighbor; and what a gloss this ironing of the glittering ploughshare lends to the richly colored loam that has lain idle so long, for no one on the farm remembers when these acres, once the mowing-lands of the plantations, were seeded down, and

the old wall that marked their eastern boundary is, for the larger part, underground.

These brown, sleek-haired oxen, with their rustic driver and stout ploughmen, their plodding on from furrow to furrow, well afield, in the mid-days of russet-cheeked October, make one of the rarest pictures in the book of seasons, and, in its rich suggestions of things that are yet to come, it has no equivalent in country life. The breaking-up plough is the platform of an incoming reform administration. Its promises are of rotations. Fern, and brake, and weeds of all sorts must vacate office at once. Hereafter crops of oats, potatoes, Indian corn, wheat and clover-blossoms, are to make the substance of the annual reports; and the signs are that the administration is to be an active one. But these new lands must be fenced, and the slender maple-poles and hemlock-stakes have been "twitched" out of the woods and up the open slopes of the pasture, and alongside of the ploughed ground, for the new fence to be built in the spring, when the sowing is over, leaving a deeply furrowed trail of rufous color through the briars and mullein-stalks which thrive so luxuriantly there. Sometimes this upturning of the new planting-lands is done in June, so the land may lie fallow through the rest of the year, but the lolling, panting oxen move the more slowly through the hot days of opening summer.

After a nipping cold night what dainty, miniature-like mosques, with glistening dome and minaret, and strange shapes of crystallized beauty, the frost has built in the crevices of the furrows! Here are mimic Fingal caves and castle-crags among their white forests, as wonderful as any that Nature ever built, though her handiwork knows no end, nor is there any diminution of the charms with which the earlier seasons are invested, for out of change and decay come new birth and new beauty.

After the fall ploughing comes a day or two at the cider-mill. The scattered piles of apples in the orchard have been gathered up from their grassy floors into the big cart and carted over the hilly highway to the barn-like structure just off the road that leads through a mile or more of tangled alder-bushes and swamp-elms to the head of the pond, along the farther shore of which is the home-farm. The black gables and sides of the old cider-mill are full of great cracks and badly worn by the storms of many winters. It is a slovenly-kept place in its surroundings of cold, boggy lands, as if the poorest and most worthless of the lands hereabouts were none too poor a setting for this otherwise dilapidated building, with its leaky roof and malodorous atmosphere.

The presiding genius of this haunt of the rustic Gambrinus, barren of romance, and so utterly

prosaic in its surroundings of low, flat lands and rambling red farm-house with its single towering elm, and at its back the meagre orchard, is a man stoutly built, with low, broad shoulders, whose half-closed eyes, keenly aglitter, and ruddy hirsuteness, betrayed a somewhat selfish and calculating disposition; a common enough quality, in these days of heartless competition, and always more to be avoided than cherished; but the heart of this Autocrat of the Cider-press was a warm one, for all that, as many a barefooted urchin would have testified, who with long rye straw drank to his fill of the liquid amber which was ever dripping when the big screws were down. As far away as those days are, I can even now see a group of youthful rustics leaning over the edge of the half-hogshead that sat close under the big press, their cheeks puffed out and ruddy with their exertion as they reach after the coveted drink of new cider. I hear the timbers creak as the men push the stout levers slowly around above the press, and the flow of this nectar of the orchard comes clearer and more musical as the "cheese" is pressed more compactly together! How the big, unwieldy screws — there were three of them — groaned and trembled as they were driven to their work! And when the "cheese" had been pressed dry, how deftly the men would "cut down" the solid cube of crushed apple and straw, with axe and spade, — "pumice,"

they called it, — to throw it one side, to make room for the new layers of apple, freshly ground, from the long trough under the grinding-mill, mixed with the clean yellow straw, from the barn-scaffold, and that is to yield new treasures for the homestead cellar.

The brown pumice, thrown out the little door in the gable, was like a land of plenty to the wasps, never more harmless — fuddled, as I believe them to have been, at this Bacchanalian feast. The wandering bees did not refuse the sipping of this dainty; and if any of them were unfortunate enough to go home in an intoxicated condition, and thereby bring scandal upon the heads of their respective families, they were to be excused, for the temptation was a grievous one. What mid-day orgies the flies held about the brown heap of refuse straw and apple, with the accompaniment of a most hilarious buzzing! After a frosty night, they no doubt thought it equal to iced champagne. Wasps, bees, or what not, they were a gloriously drunken company, and a disgrace to anything with wings. What a romance, another romance, this making of the cider was, among the bursting bins of scented fruit, with the dusty cobweb rafters overhead, their thick shadows lighted with here and there a bar of creviced gold, slanting down against the inner walls, with the slow-paced horse pulling the long, clumsy arm

of the grinder round and round its narrow circuit, groaning under a constantly added burden from the bins! But what a dirty, narrow yard was outside, with its deeps of black mud, full of ruts, and hieroglyphic of wheel-track and hoof-print, and strewn with dead leaves from the orchard close by. A romance indeed that cannot be told upon a single page, the last act of which closes with the chill November nightfall, when the stoutly hooped oaken casks, filled to overbrimming, are tightly sealed, each bung being made more tight with many a carefully laid strip of yellow corn-husk, so that not a drop of this rustic-made champagne shall escape on the journey homeward. The stars are out in the sky, never more brilliant than on these fall nights, and never seeming so near to earth; but another star comes in sight, low down among the orchard-trees, as the team climbs the slow rise of the highway, above the dim, gray line of which is the old square homestead, with its windows aglow with the cheery brightness of the blazing hearth-fire within.

"Back-sh!

"Put in thar! put-in-tha—r!" and, with much vociferous exertion on the part of the teamster, the oxen have backed the cart, with its heavy load, against the mouth of the granite-walled alley that leads to the cellar, where, by the glimmering light of a whale-oil lantern, the clumsy cart-body

is tipped up a bit from its like clumsy tongue; the skids are put in place, and one after another the barrels are rolled into the warm cellar, to be "horsed up" a day or two later into their winter resting-places. The last cask is not unloaded before a bung is started, and the long, clean straws, saved from the wheat scaffold before the threshers came, are forthcoming; and, in a moment more, a trio of mouths are drawing deep pleasure from the nearest barrel. These straws pointed at something other than the quarter toward which the wind was setting.

A few days later the wide cellar-doors are closed and barred on their inner side, not to be opened until the warm south winds of spring blow the dandelions into blossom. It was with much of interest and curiosity that my boyish eyes watched the battening of these doors with many a thick strip of old woollen material, until every crack and cranny through which the frost-sprites might enter were securely barricaded; and, as if this were not enough, the "pointing" all around with a coarse mortar of lime and sand, or with bright, yellow clay from the meadow brook, with which many a chimney was built or bonded together when lime was scarce or too expensive. The old settler was not less of a genius than an economist, and Nature was appealed to more often in those days than now for alternatives. Not only

were the cellar-walls battened and plastered within, but they were sheltered without with thick layers of fragrant fir-boughs, which were extended entirely about the granite underpinning of the old house. Five months of winter, with as many feet of snow on a level for days, with the mercury at zero, and even below, for a whole fortnight or more, initiated a "spell" of cold, against the silent, unheralded approach of which the farmer could not be too vigilant; but, after all precaution, the frost would creep in between the huge split stones in the cellar-wall, only to find the pipkins and potatoes well blanketed and beyond its reach. A frost-nipped potato at dinner was a delicacy to me in those days, tasting, as it did, something like the sweet tuber of the South; it possessed an especial relish to my uneducated palate, though it was detested by the adult portion of the family.

So, day by day, the steps are taken with slow certainty toward this goal of rest, when the harvest-work is at last over, and everything made snug and tight for the drifting snows and sleet-laden winds; nor is it to be wondered at that the thrifty husbandman and his faithful helpmeet in the farm-house appreciate their well earned interregnum of resting days, and look forward to the celebration of this Autumn festival with all its devoutness, its attendant jollity and good eating, with a joyous anticipation.

It is a glorious ride homeward from the old church, with the sun just past its meridian, while always before, and often below the line of vision, lies spread out the white, silent picture of the dazzling winter landscape. There is a magic in the snow; for the familiar roadway, hemmed in with bramble of scrub-apple and blackberry-briar, with alder, and birch, and elderberry-bush, has grown strangely unfamiliar over-night. Nothing retains its former individuality, for the fences are hidden under a heap of snowy covering, and even the trees have lost shape and outline. Everything seems to have undergone a subtle change, as of diminution. The pine-woods do not seem so lofty as on yester-afternoon, but look discouraged and cast down under their damp, clinging burden. The trees in the orchard are shrunken and dwarfed-looking, making but a beggarly appearance, with their misshapen trunks and ragged, out-at-the-elbow-like limbs; the farm-buildings have a look as if they were slowly settling into the ground; the woodlands have stolen upon us unawares in a single night, and seem but a step away across the narrowed pastures. The sleigh-tracks, scarce a yard apart, along the broad highway, lend a reality to the illusion, while the horizon seems nearer and the blue skies lower down than ever. There is a sense of compactness, as if Nature had packed her belongings in one huge trunk, and was about

to take a long journey; a feeling that is much intensified as one looks from the cosey hearth-fire out upon the embargo of Winter. There is a rare sense of shelter in the all-enveloping snow, and, no matter how hard the sleet beats against the window-pane, with a glowing wood fire on the ample hearth, and the cheery company of home-folk, and a few chosen companions from the book-shelf, one can be a philosopher with small effort: and what would seem a dismal howling of the storm is transposed into the tuneful music of the elements. But the farm-house is in sight, and, with an extra shake of the string of deep-sounding bells by the horse, as if to add emphasis to his satisfaction, the house-door is reached, wide-open, and within which is standing a goodly-looking woman, her mild eyes of softest brown just a bit disturbed, as if tired with over-waiting; her long apron of checked or blue mixed homespun stuff thrown carelessly about her head, down upon which noiselessly drift troops of glittering snow-crystals through the sunlit air, blown from the low roof above, as she urges the travellers to "be quick with the horse," as dinner has been "waiting too long already." Premising that my reader is aware of the womanly capacity for asking questions when information is desired, the string of questions that greeted the advent of two hungry church-goers into the big kitchen, as, stamping the snow from their boots,

and pulling themselves out of their overcoats, they made ready for dinner, was of the most entertaining character — to the inquirer, at least. But what a dinner! for there was nothing lacking from the menu which made up this old-fashioned repast that the farm produced, all done to a turn, and steaming hot, and fit to set before a king!

Here is the menu, if you have the curiosity to see it as others did, glancing here and there about the table literally creaking under its burden of good things: — cold roast spare rib, pig brown and crisp, and roast turkey, juicy and tender, plied full to bursting with incomparable stuffing, for removes; — potatoes baked in the hot ashes of the open fire, white, fine, and dry like meal, with real giblet-sauce; an accompanying big dish of boiled onions, indispensable upon such occasions; boiled cider-apple sauce and cold slaw of Dutch cabbage, for entrées. Then, there was the big pot-pie of game, mayhap of gray squirrel and partridge; the old-fashioned *suet* pudding, boiled in a bag of coarse cloth, a dainty much prized in those days; another pudding, stuck full of plums as big as any that little Jack Horner found in his own as he sat in his chimney-corner; and such rare apple and mince pies! For dessert there was the lightest, whitest of cream biscuit; the rarest of golden butter, made before the days of artificial coloring, kept company with a plate of amber-colored honey

fresh from the hives; doughnuts and cheese in abundance, and at each plate a bumping glass of newly made cider, with just a discernible "*tang*," which was the only drinkable, outside the regulation tea and coffee. It was a rare good dinner, in its setting of blue, antique-patterned china, with knives and forks of steel, scoured to such brilliance as "Bristol brick" and hard rubbing could lend, with clumsy handles of plain buck-horn, rough, unpretentious, and homely; a dinner, the rugged cheer and unstinted eating of which was most excellent proof of the appreciation in which the bounty of the well tilled fields was held, and which, if it perchance entailed upon its partakers a transient feeling of discomfort, was but a repetition of what had occurred upon many a past anniversary of this feast-day of the Forefathers.

Perhaps time, like distance, may lend its enchantments to my thought, but, dear as the old place has come to be during these fast-going years, never were the home-lands dearer than when, aglow with boyish ardor and curiosity, I made a part of Nature's rustic class, for there was not a tree in the old orchard, the lichen-stained bark of which I had not caressed with many an ardent hug and sturdy climb; and in the woods above the meadow, or beyond the hill by the pond, there was not an unfamiliar path or trail, and the larger trees, the lindens, oaks, beeches, and ma-

ples, the dark, towering spruces and taller pines, the dusky hemlocks, with their embroidery-like foliage, were all ancient friends. Not a bit of rail fence, or reach of old wall, or thicket of choke-cherry bush but I had scoured for the hundredth time, with lynx-eyed scrutiny, for the burrowing-places of the sly woodchuck or the loud-chattering striped squirrel or chipmonk, as we called them in our boyish hunts, along with the cedar-bird, whose handsome drab coat, with black and scarlet trimmings, was always so attractive to me, or about which I had not set up my clumsy, home-made box-trap, with its long, slender spindle, baited with a "nubbin" of corn, or a sweet apple instead; nor was there a foot of the broad uplands over which I had not stalked after plover. Never have I found a couch so restful as the mattress of springing green under the apple-trees, from their days of drifting blossoms, to when their low-reaching limbs were laden with ruddy, luscious fruit, and when the September skies, yellow with golden haze, hung their draperies about the woods and hills.

What perfect happiness was held within the too short cycle of a year, with its slow-coming and slow-retreating days, and that made the sum total of Childhood, the Lotus-land of one's lifetime, when it was not a dream but a reality to lie prone amid the sweet field-blossoms, daintily, gracefully

nodding, and giving out their perfume to every hoyden breeze, with face turned skyward, the soft air ravished and palpitating with the music of bobolink, bright-colored oriole, and song-sparrow,

> "The ballad-singers and the troubadours,
> The street-musicians of the heavenly city,"

and, over all, the bright sunshine falling in halting, broken shafts of light, down through the dark, glossy-leaved tops of the apple-trees, and where, looking up, always up,

> "I watch the swallows flying,"

dipping and skimming with swift flight, here and there, in search of a pair of singing wings for their morning lunch. What happy, happy birds they were, and what swift ambitions kept pace with their rapid flight with the unuttered wish,

> "Couldst thou tell me which road is best
> Cleaving the high air with thy soft breast
> For keel? O Swallow,
> Thou must o'erlook
> My seas and know if I mistake;
> I would not the same harbor make
> Which Yesterday forsook."

Far, far away are those days, as far away as the stars in the sky, and as unattainable; but whatever I see or hear that recalls boyhood sights

and sounds, homely it may be, the vision never comes but it stirs to the centre every fibre of my inner self, and days and years abate, and I am once more the careless youth, forgetful of all but the old affection for the fields and woods, and in my portfolio of reminiscence are stored many a broadly painted picture, such as no canvas ever held.

There is no haste in the eating of this brave dinner, but every one takes abundance of time, and, after each has eaten to heart's content, the old, basket-bottomed chairs are moved back with a hesitating, doubtful air, bit by bit, as if the occasion had not been sufficiently honored in its observance. The conversation, so brisk in the earlier part of the feast, has lulled into silence. Each seems mentally in a state of preoccupation. The sun pours its slanting light through the westward-looking windows, and the snow-flakes are still drifting, sifting down from the house-roof against the warm window-panes. The little clock on its narrow shelf between the windows marks the slow-going hours with mechanical exactness, and with a never varying monotony of speech, unheeding the jealous crackle of the open fire, which now looks pale and colorless in the bright sunlight that floods the home-made rugs and broad fireplace and its dingy wainscoting with the glory of its slow-setting splendor. The huge fore-stick, laid in the early

forenoon, will break apart in a moment, to throw its ruddy coals about the tiled hearth. The brand has parted. A hasty movement to brush up the scattered fire, on the part of some member of the family, is the untoward signal that the rites of the feast have been concluded; it is none too soon, for chore-time has already come, with its feeding and watering of the cattle at the barn, and the getting-in of the wood at the house. Mid-afternoon past, the winter day closes swiftly. The horizon-line of the White Hills, growing more darkly blue, as if cast in a mordant of *ultramarine*, is massed against a sky brilliant with color; its coldly tempered edges drawn sharply through the west as if to cut heaven and earth asunder.

"The sun, a snow-blown traveller,"

dips slowly and steadily toward the gray sea of bare woods, that lengthen out miles on miles to the foot-hills of the mountains, their silences broken only by the rasping notes of the belated crows, the Bedouins of the farm, as they come over the hill upon their southward flight. The best wish the farmer has for them is that they will not find their way back in the spring.

The next half-hour is a busy one for the housewife, and, while the clatter of the dishes goes on, the men-folks are about the chores to get them done up quickly. The snow-buntings have already

begun their chatter about the door-steps, even before the big table-cloth is shaken, as it always is, over the snow at their side, the daily feeding-ground of these brave little sojourners of our New England winter woods. The stormy north winds have not the slightest terror for the snow-birds, small as they are; and the deeper the snows, the more noisy their frolics among the bare boughs.

They are the most agreeable out-door companions, for, no matter how cheerless the day, — if a winter day can be cheerless, and I doubt it, — they chatter, chatter overhead and underfoot, tipping their little heads to one side and the other, this way and that, with many a knowing wink, as if the winter chopper and themselves were making common cause against the inclemency of the weather. They are remarkably friendly and inquisitive in their dispositions, and seem to delight in having all the woods to themselves, playing many a queer prank and antic in their seeming desire to entertain their human visitors. They are one of Nature's most delightful freaks in this land of snow. But the sun has disappeared

"From sight beneath the smothering bank"

of western snow-clad hills, now grown dusky in the short winter twilight; the cattle at the barn have been watered and fed, while we boys have

"Piled with care our nightly stack
Of wood against the chimney-back,—
The oaken log, green, huge, and thick,
And on its top, the stout back-stick;
The knotty fore-stick laid apart,
And filled between with curious art
The ragged brush; then, hovering near,
We watched the first red blaze appear,
Heard the sharp crackle, caught the gleam"

on quaintly papered wall and whitened ceiling, festooned with many a loop of cored apple, hanging pendent from the drying-poles, held firmly in place by iron hooks, driven years ago into the splintery hemlock lathing,

"Until the old, rude-furnished room
Burst flower-like into rosy bloom,"—

while snowy window-pane and drift-piled ledge and dusky sash were resplendent with fire-light glow. The little, round-topped light-stand of painted pine, with its three short legs, was drawn into the middle of the room, and the dented, battered brazen candle-sticks, — so old are they, — that through the day ornamented the narrow mantel over the fireplace, their tallow-dips carefully snuffed and lighted, were set in place, and a brave light we thought them before the advent of kerosene. Even after the brilliant burning oils found their way to the country-store, farm-folks were not averse to the light of the richly endowed

pitch-knot; and, viewed in the light of domestic economy, the pine-knot was not to be laughed at, for its heat was of the rarest quality, and there was ever a big pile of these pasture-gleaned light-bearers in one corner of the wood-shed.

This night, of all the year, the family stayed at home. There was no going to the neighbor's for an hour's gossip, or to the store for a brief hour or two of loafing, and the Thanksgiving dance was not then indulged in to any great extent among the more respectable portion of the community, in the more exclusively farming districts. Beech-nuts, butternuts, apples, and cider furnished the good cheer, and, what with talk of one sort and another, of story-telling, or most-like an innocent game of checkers, or of "fox and geese," the evening was rapidly passed.

Old-fashioned as were those days, and primitive as were their ways of living, there had been more old-fashioned days than they, and days of more primitive manners, and all within the memory of the grown-up people, who never tired of telling how their fathers were wont to hitch the farm-horse to the heavy back-stick, and in that way pull it into the great kitchen, to be rolled with hand-spikes against the back of the fireplace, so tall and wide that a horse could stand within it; when there were but two or three roads in town, and the proximity of the nearest neighbor was reckoned

by miles, two, three, and often more, and the school-house, where they had one, was even still farther away; when a flint and steel, a box of powdered *punk* or tinder, and a rude hand-bellows, were the only means at hand for the building of a fire; when those were lacking, coals were borrowed at the nearest house, with which to start the hearth-flame anew; — days that abounded in adventures of the hunt, oftentimes full of peril; days of rude desire and of rude plenty.

We children never tired of listening to these tales, from one who, like "Uncle Enoch," was so

> "Rich in lore of fields and brooks,
> The ancient teachers never dumb
> Of Nature's unhoused lyceum.
> In moons and tides and weather-wise,
> He read the clouds as prophecies,
> And foul or fair could well divine,
> By many an occult hint, and sign,
> Holding the cunning-warded keys
> To all the wood-craft mysteries;
> Himself to Nature's heart so near
> That all her voicings in his ear,
> Of beast or bird, had meanings clear,
> Like Apollonius of old,
> Who knew the tales the sparrows told,
> Or Hermes, who interpreted
> What the sage cranes of Nilus said;
> A simple, guileless, childlike man,
> Content to live where life began; —
> He told how teal and loon he shot,
> And how the eagle's eggs he got,
> The feats on pond and river done,

The prodigies of rod and gun;
Till, warming with the tales he told,
Forgotten was the outside cold,
The bitter wind unheeding blew,
From ripening corn the pigeons flew,
The partridge drummed i' the wood, the mink
Went fishing down the river-brink.
In fields with bean or clover gay,
The woodchuck, like a hermit gray,
Peered from the door-way of his cell;
The musk-rat plied his mason's trade,
And tier by tier his mud walls laid;
And from the shag-bark overhead
The grizzled squirrel dropped his shell;"—

and tell them as often as he would, they were ever fresh, and held our rapt attention; but what most we wished to hear was of his "sojerin'" at the "Madawaska" war, which in later years I learned was a bloodless, inglorious campaign. How unfortunate it is that romance ever takes its flight along with childhood's tender, trusting, unselfish heart.

But this first day of real winter-weather is done. Sated with its homely pleasures, we boys steal off to our bed under the rafters, just as the clock is striking nine; and in a few moments, warmly wrapped in thick woollen blankets, we are lying with our faces to the stars, that look so kindly in through the diminutive window-panes in the little gabled alcove, that reaches down behind our sleeping-place to the eaves. A bit of a chat was always

in order, unless we caught the sound of warning rap on the ceiling beneath us, when we bade each good-night, and went fast-asleep; but to-night, dozy with so much eating, the usual talk is postponed; and soon oblivious to all things of an outward character, we slumber on into another day.

A WINTER RESORT.

A WINTER RESORT.

IKE a soft, wooing "dream of Hafiz," the old days come back, and with them many a tender memory and charming reminiscence to gild busy Manhood with a larger strength and comeliness. One can never tell how much or how little of the old life has served as the foundation-stones of an after career, but an inspection of the chinks and crannies in the newer edifice of human hopes and accomplishments will reveal many a forgotten childish hour, the pleasures of which come back to us unawares, creeping up to the threshold of our heart-dwelling, ready to come in and entertain us at the first kindly invitation. What visions come with the closing of the eyelids, and what sweet voicings of old-time melodies haunt the brooding silence of the night-fall, to softly steal away the senses with fair dreams, exorcising with a greater than a Merlin's magic the carking imps of Care! How swiftly fall away the garments of the years, when Boyhood whispers to one of nestling hillside-acre and close-knit orchard, of rustling woodland leafage

and limpid streams, that steal their beauty ever from the sky, and pitch their airy trebles to the deep bass of soughing pines and rain-dripping winds, or to the lighter strains of tripping, odorous June breezes, blown fresh from the gardens of far-off mountains; of wide-eyed summer sunlight and ruddy twilights, palpitating with piping notes from the swamps and sweet nocturnes from the woodlands; of topaz-tinted woods with their soft reveille of falling nuts; of bright firelit nights that come with gray November days and amber sunsets; of glistening, snowy fields, caressed by nipping winds that touch each tip of nose and ear with stinging cold, as, beating northward to the old school-house that held the bleakest spot along the road, we plunged through the drifted, unbroken highway with brave, onward step, the impetus of which has not yet lost its impelling power. O Heart, what a magician thou art!

The memory of rustic sights and of rustic notes makes every man his own poet. We cannot always write our heart-songs to the recollection of such days, yet the unwritten songs are they that fill many a silent hour with a wonderful harmony which can be interpreted only by the Soul. The heart is a great composer, the singer of scores of unwritten melodies, loftier, more grand, and rarer than any that have been written. Only God

hears the finer vibrations of its numberless chords, its sweetest strains.

It is Nature that thrills created things with the rhythm and poetry of motion, that sits upon the lofty hills, clothed with thick woods, and garnished with singing streams, hidden within the shadows of flying clouds and drifting mists, and that makes the entrancing music, the magic song, that stirs into kindred vibration the heart-strings of others. I have never listened to any orchestra like that to which Nature trips her measures when the robins and bobolinks are making love among the orchard-shadows upon the flower-set stage of June. No opera has ever had for me a tithe of the charm that lingers about many a recollection of mischievous frolic behind the old pine-desks of the country school-house, of woodland-tramp, or pasture-romp of boyhood, with every separate day and every flying hour a changing scene.

They who have in their youth and early childhood loved Nature for the simple pleasures she ever affords, the woods, the nodding grasses of the fields, the bees and flowers, the piping frogs and singing birds, are always in funds. Nature has no discordant notes, and even the rain-drop has a harmonic quality. If one could get the pitch, the tone in the deep reverberations, the jarring, the rolling, the broken rhythm of the thunder, its

kindred chord in music would not be difficult to find. The creaking vines against the windows have sweet songs whose minor strains are in rare tune with the contraltos of the driving storm-winds, but only a lover of these things and their kind can catch the beauty of their weird harmony. What wealth has one whose lines have been drawn among the "highways and by-ways" of Nature. Such an one needs not to go to the great art-galleries to be entertained with sights of rare pictures mellowed by the centuries, visions once so real to the Old Masters, for the galleries of the heart possess the rarer art-treasures, the larger fund of real happiness. The arched ceiling of St. Peter's has no such frescos as are painted upon the roofs of the Soul, roofs as ample and wide-reaching as the blue of the summer sky, and as boundless as the never-ending circle of the horizon. No Old World palace, rich though it be with color, and pulsating with the touch of hands long since stilled, holds such glowing canvases as hang upon the walls of childish remembrance. The Sistine Madonna cannot compare with the motherhood we knew about the old hearth-stone. A greater than a Raphael or a Rubens has left his treasures in our keeping, and Time has no corroding elements that abate their freshness. The years but add to their value; and, strange as it may seem, the farther away from the

portal of Childhood we get, the more they are multiplied. Not a picture but has its unforgotten tale of comedy or romance. No conjurer's trick or legerdemain has the secret of surprise like the heart's loyalty to home and the old home-influences. How these pictures crowd each upon the other!

> From far-off days these glimpses come;
> As, on the margin of the sea,
> White sails of vessels nearing home
> Rise one by one, and silently
> Creep inward on the lazy tide,
> And, safely moored at last beside
> The black wharves and parapets of the shore,
> Drop their rich treasures at our open door.
>
> As if some hand the ivory keys
> Of olden times had swept across;
> Brought back their subtle harmonies
> To emphasize our sense of loss:
> No place, no day so poor to me,
> But held some trifling history;
> Some thought of kindly speech, or rarer deed
> Of which our worth or folly stood in need.

It was the day after Thanksgiving, and the fleeting hours were full of notes of boyish preparation for the winter school, so soon to open. The familiar depository of books and papers, in the corner of the ample sitting-room, was thoroughly ransacked for the school-books, some of quite ancient imprint, and each well thumbed,

dog-eared leaf of which was marked with some special hieroglyphic or way-sign along the then seemingly tedious road to knowledge. The arithmetic, with its old-fashioned *Double Rule of Three* and brief formulas, was hardly more than a book of ancient mathematical puzzles, a scant improvement upon its immediate predecessor, the old "Kinney's" of my grandfather's days, while the geography that bore the humble patronymic of "Smith," with its thin quarto atlas, was a fit consort to the old Green's grammar, that had been in the family a generation and a half nearly, and which, with Pope's *Essay on Man*, then much in vogue as a parsing-book, a Webster's speller, and a thin book, bound in green boards, that served as a reader, the first I can remember, and which told in quaint rhyme, for one of its reading-lessons, the story of

> "A white old hen, with yellow legs,
> Who'd laid her master many eggs,
> Which from her nest the boys had taken
> To put in cake or fry with bacon,
> Was roosting in an outer hovel,
> Where barrel, bird-cage, riddle, shovel,
> Tub, piggin, corn-bag, all together,
> Were put, to keep them from the weather,"—

a tale that always possessed a great interest to my boyish mind, and which I have not forgotten in these later years. This old reading-book com-

pleted the total of school-literature of the household, — a barren stock, indeed, but enough, for all that, if one may judge by the brawn and brain of that generation.

Next came the writing-books with their neatly written copies across the head-line, half-filled with numerous blots and scrawls that might well pass for cabalistic characters transcribed from some Egyptian obelisk; and at the bottom of all else lay the big, thick slate, with its greenish-like, mouldy-looking spot in one corner, encased round about with a stout birchen frame, sadly hacked and whittled during many a purposeless, restless moment of school-boy mood, a clumsy, home-made frame, that, in spite of many a perilous fall upon the worn spruce floor of the school-house, and many a battering of swift-flying snow-ball as the children went home at night, has preserved the homely old slate with never a nick or fracture, that is still numbered among the mementos and treasures of old times. And now the sight of its opaque yet smoothly polished surface will, like a wizard's spell, conjure up hosts of episodes and familiar faces of by-gone, and with them many a long silenced voice, to make the delusion more real. The old days look out from its dusky plane, and pictures come and go, crowding, jostling one against another, with every minute, developing swiftly, as if here were a thousand negatives or

photographic plates in one. Rarest of all is the vision of a fair, sweet face, that for years has been hidden beneath the nodding blossoms of a far-away hill-side, with only the stars and singing-birds to keep it company, a memory still fondly cherished — of

> "A beautiful and happy girl,
> With step as light as summer air,
> Eyes glad with smiles, and brow of pearl
> Shadowed by many a careless curl
> Of unconfined and flowing hair;
> A seeming child in everything,
> Save thoughtful brow and ripening charms,
> As Nature wears the smile of Spring
> When sinking into Summer's arms.
> A heart which, like a fine-toned lute,
> With every breath of feeling woke,
> And even when the tongue was mute,
> From eye and lip in music spoke."

How dear the romance of those days of sunny faces and clear skies, at the thought of which steal softly back, with swift, unconscious step,

> "Old hopes which long in dust have lain,"

stirring every fibre of the heart. It is in these reflective moments, when one rambles into the far-off Cathay of the past days, when

> "The shadows melt and fall apart,
> And, smiling through them, round us lies
> The warm light of our morning skies, —
> The Indian summer of the heart!" —

that we know life is worth the living. It is a delightful retrospect, this dream-land of the swift-flying years, elevating and cheering the loneliest hours, a panacea for discomfort and human trial. Like an open book upon the table, full of choice thoughts and comforting inspirations and rare, soothing pleasures, a thousand times read and re-read, always new and entertaining, open at any leaf we may, our weariness and perplexity melt away before such thoughts as the mists before the morning sun.

With these old acquaintances laid out, the field is surveyed; marked out with mental link and chain are the boundaries of the intellectual possessions to which we hold the title-deeds, as well those we hope to acquire in coming days. Who has not felt the ambitions of that superlative moment when all the world seems to be before? when the grand deeds of others made up the sum of one's possessions, rather than the futile, insignificant rewards of one's own exertions that come with a broader experience and more mature years. Warm and bright the sunlight of that far-off winter morning lay upon the gray painted floor of the homely sitting-room, strewn here and there with a half-dozen of home-made braided rugs, severely plain in all its furnishings, and barren of all but comfort. Nor had we any sense of poverty then. Barren was it?

No ancient Delft or Cloissonné,
Or inlaid vase from quaint Japan,
Above a carved mantel lay;
No costly mats from Hindostan,
Or antique clock, with face o'erwrit
With mystic symbols requisite,
Marked slow, beside its dark, wainscoted wall,
The waning moons, the damp tide's rise and fall.

No Whittier, rich with soulful rhymes,
And home-brewed ale of song is here;
No sound of Bruges' mellow chimes,
Or "Wayside Tale," or creaking pier.
A dozen books piled on their shelf
Nailed 'neath the dingy clock — itself
An heirloom with the rest — made up the store
That bred no wish for other, newer lore.

But our hearts were warm with the influx of youthful dreams, of conquests to be made over the tilling of that unknown ground, in the days so close at hand, as scant of real helps as the hearth-stone blazing before us was of Dutch tiles and Flemish iron-work. The immortal Spirit of the Fire lived in the cheery blaze of beechen log; so the immortal Fire of Aspiration burned brightly upon the hearth-stone of the heart. The outside world was a fairy-land, with its great men, its great cities, and the ocean with its big ships, but tales of all these things had come to us, and made rare fuel for our imagination: it was a rude work-shop, but rude work-shops oftentimes turn out rare work.

II.

Two days more, and the three months of country-school will have begun for the winter. For a fortnight past, the traveller over the narrow highway which ran through the then busiest portion of the old town, the sleepy hamlet of Spurwink, once more familiar to my wandering footsteps than in later years, may have noticed a bit of paper, oblong in shape, and of scant proportions, tacked against the cracked door-panel of faded green paint, once bright and fresh, that marked the single portal of the low-studded, orchard-girt, brick school-house, over the threshold of which, now worn thin by a multitude of footsteps, have stormed the flying feet of children for two generations, whose incomings and outgoings were colored with all the romance and vicissitude of childish loves and follies, of gratified success and disappointed ambition.

If the traveller had paused to read the faded ink, too often diluted, or, rather, stimulated by libations from the vinegar cruet, with all its corrosive acidity, — as many a rusty school-pen would testify, — written with stiff, cramped hand, and now blurred into an illegible scrawl, with the drenching it got by the last rain-storm, he might have deciphered its legend to this effect: that on

"the Monday following Thanksgiving the Winter School" in that district would open, etc.; at the end of all which is appended, in a series of extraordinary flourishes, or, it may be, in a group of strange hieroglyphics of microscopic size, the sign-manual of that most important in the list of minor town-functionaries, the "deestrick agent," whose election at the "April meetin'" was the result, I may venture to assume, of a great deal of wire-pulling; as if the fate of this bucolic part of the municipality depended entirely upon the individual who, fortunately or unfortunately, should be put in charge of the destinies of the school-going youth of its quiet and, to the outside world, insignificant burg.

This school-house was, from my earliest remembrance, on Sunday nights, the scene of a meeting of a few yet faithful, of the old-time sort, church-going people; who, at "early candle-light," wended their way hither to testify to the faith of their fathers, the same faith that sent the Mayflower on her New World voyage. In storm or sun, by the fading light of still, windless winter sunsets or in the face of blustering, snow-laden winds and over the badly broken roads, they came; there were the faithful "two or three" present, in whose hearts burned a living flame that kept out cold and discomfort alike; old-time Puritans in spirit and in deed were these, who gathered with each returning

Sabbath twilight to worship among the lurking shadows of four bare walls, at no time more than dimly outlined in the flickering light of a half-dozen candles or "tallow-dips," — oftentimes there was only one of these sputtering, uncertain means of illumination, — held bolt-upright in greasy tin sockets, nailed to the wall; for only the bits of candles, or "dips," unconsumed, were carried home at the close of these humble but devout exercises, in like manner as they were brought hither, wrapped carefully in a bit of stout parcel-paper, for economy was religiously taught and practised. By ones and twos the people came; men, women, and children in fair proportion, to scatter among the huddled desks, and along their pine seats, cold and comfortless enough in the winter-chilled atmosphere; the indefinable sense of shrinking, shivering restlessness the more sharply accentuated by the slow, discouraged crackle of the fire in the huge stove by the inner door, that stands ever ajar for the need of a latch. The old one was broken in a school-boy scuffle so long ago that the event is forgotten.

The liveliest fire, the whole evening through, but partly dispels the inclemency of the season that has crept through the chinks and crannies of the windows of this rustic cloister during the past week; but physical discomfort has no terrors for this group of worshippers, who sit here in the dim

waiting silence until good old Deacon —— shall remind his flock that the "time has arriv' to open the meetin'," and then proceed to sound his mental tuning-fork, and, with cracked, wheezy treble, pitch the tone to familiar "Greenville," — a good, old-fashioned "penny-rial," — when, at the rather untuneful signal, the people would join in, first one and then another, singing the hymn: —

"Far from mortal cares retreating,
Sordid hopes and vain desires,
Here our willing footsteps meeting,
Every heart to heaven aspires,"

every stanza of which was sung. This hymn and its old tune were more frequently sung in those simple days than now, but why it should be so I cannot imagine, for, to my thinking, the old tunes have a simplicity and directness, a harmony and rhythm of movement, and a grandeur of centuries of devotion, that the newer compositions do not possess. There is a sublime pathos in the music the old Christians sung, and, if I mistake not, some of their bravery, their religious spirit, their martyrdom has been, like the lingering perfume of a long ago plucked flower, their secret charm, a sentiment not without its power in these days. As the singing-master used to say, "they have the wear in 'em." There is nothing in the church-music of these times, with their brilliant services, that touches the secret springs of the heart like

the old strains, the humble but magnificent melodies of the early church. I am back again in the old seat, where, I am sorry to say, I played many a mischievous prank during service, as most boys do at some period of their existence, and I hear the singers, their deep, mellow bass running through the whole like a string upon which are strung hosts of tenor, treble, and alto notes, and how harmoniously those untrained voices, with all their crude strength and rough, robust timbre, blended, as each singer beat the time with half-uplifted hand or gently nodding head; and scarcely has the last note died away, when some brother, with faltering movement, rises to "lead" in prayer.

How plainly comes the vision of the gray-haired deacon, never so slow and deliberate as at this very moment, less provoking now in his deliberateness of action than when the farmers drove their horses or oxen to his shop to be cunningly shod; his burly form casting its Herculean shadow upon wall and ceiling, behind and above him, as, standing with a stoop common to men of his craft, with dripping candle in one hand and his coarse-lettered Testament in the other, he read, "I am the way, the truth, and the Life," and with what simple dignity the inspired words fell from his tremulous lips, as if his assurance of a well earned victory was doubly sure. But was there

ever a slower-moulded man than he? Then came exhortation and experience from one and another, with long "spells" of silent waiting between, with the frequent reminder from this Nestor of the parish, "the time is passin', brethren." It was with patience I waited on this particular occasion, with my old speller tightly buttoned under my home-made jacket, ready at the breaking-up of the meeting to thrust it slyly into the chosen desk in the back row, which I had determined to preëmpt against the earliest comer on the morning of the morrow, should I fail to be that one myself, for to-morrow, before eight o'clock, every big boy in the district will be here, and the usual pandemonium will prevail, as is common to the opening morning of the winter school, when every boy, by hook or crook, attempts to locate himself in his chosen place for the session.

The meeting closes, as all meetings do, at last, and, doubtful of my legal rights in this particular case, I dodge into the deep shadow of some desk, and, with breathless anxiety, await the slow departure of the older people and the boys and girls, whose careless scrutiny I have escaped. The lock snaps in the outer door, and, after a few moments more of waiting, in the deep silence of which every heart-beat of my own is plainly audible, I slip the stick that fastens the lower sash of one of the two rear windows from its place, and,

breaking it, leap from the outer sill into the snow, well pleased with the strategy that will give me entrance to the old school-room with the early dawn. The sleepless night well over, I have strapped my school-books to the old slate, with the little Testament atop of all, with luncheon stuffed into the pockets of my overcoat, and am well down the pine-sheltered road, on my way to this Mecca of my winter pilgrimage.

How still the winter morning! Not a breath of wind, not a sound except the crunching of my thick cowhide boots over the beaten, frosty track of the snowy highway with every buoyant step. The paling light brightens slowly: —

> "The circle of ether, deep, ruddy, and vast,
> Scarce glimmers with one of the train that were there,
> And the leader, the day-star, the brightest and last,
> Twinkles faintly and fades in that desert of air."

So night has blown her lamps out, one by one, and the sky is growing more luminous in the east, multiplying streak upon streak of crimson, flushing the horizon with carmine glory, with not a cloud to be seen, and, —

> "The waning moon, all pale and dim," —

just sinking out of sight behind distant Chocorua's glistening horn. With what cold, sharp outlines these northward-reaching monarchs of the hills are piled, one against the other, like mountain

masses of blued steel! A few moments later, how brilliantly they come out against the gray west, as they catch the first glimpse of the sun! The farm-houses along the way are still held in drowsy slumber, with not a single curling chimney-smoke in sight, and it is too early yet to hear

"The cock's shrill clarion."

How silent this Kingdom of the Frost! What bitter, stinging cold creeps through the porch-way of the mouth and nostrils into the chambers of the lungs, quickening the sluggish blood into tumultuous activity! What hidden storage-batteries of electricity are these that strain each nerve in the body into an aching tension, with an exhilaration almost akin to the upbearing flight of a bird!

It is a dazzling scene this morning landscape makes, with every sagging rail and slanting perch for the summer birds in the road-side fence, and every leafless twig and wide-flung limb and scraggy bush, thickly encased in a chilled armor of hoar-frost, that, when the sun is up, glint and glisten with vivid splendor.

"Look! the massy trunks
Are encased in pure crystal; each light spray,
Nodding and tinkling in the breath of heaven,
Is studded thick with trembling water-drops,
That glimmer with an amethystine light."

Rarely blest is the Soul that draws its window-curtains aside to look upon such rare morning vision where Nature is supreme. The seeing of such sunrise splendor makes thought swift-winged; and as the

> "Wizard of the Merrimac
> So old ancestral legends say —
> Could call green leaf and blossom back
> To frosted stem and spray,"

I see within each scintillant wayside jewel, not only pictures of,

> "Piercing winter frost, and winds, and darkened air,"

and sleety storm, with hordes of driving snow-flakes sifting down the sleepy hollows of the pastures and through the moaning woods, and over the bare meadows, drifting full, and hiding the narrow brooks under many an archway of strange, fantastic shape, with boisterous, blustering breath and freaks of careless cunning, but glimpses of radiant Summer, with her blushing fields wet with fragrant dew, and lightly veiled in warm-cheeked mists that wait the ecstatic hour when

> "the young archer, Morn, shall break
> His arrows on the mountain-pines,
> And, golden-sandalled, walk the lake," —

driving them before. I see her vast cathedral of high noon, with dome of overarching blue, where

> "White clouds, whose shadows haunt the deep,
> Light mists, whose soft embraces keep
> The sunshine on the hills asleep,"

await the high-mass of the swift-shod winds and rain and pealing thunder. How different the silence of this morning-hour from the hot, pulsating stillness, the drowsy languor of a summer-noon; or when out of the falling twilight, broad-orbed, and yellow like virgin gold,

> "The moon, slow rounding into sight,
> On the hushed inland sea looks down."

This is the silence of Death unto the Resurrection of a new Life, while the silences of Summer are the quiet slumberings of a tired child; but if this is Death, with what beautiful, shining countenance he walks the breadth of his dominions!

My feet have kept pace with my thoughts, and over the crest of the hill, village-ward, a lone chimney sends up an isolated column of blue smoke, a warning sign from one of the village-roofs that some one is astir. Its betrayal of some early riser sends me across-lots, over the tumbling stone wall, into the corn-stubble, half-buried in snow, of a neighboring field, down through the alders and drooping birches of the swamp that flank the wide-stretching woods, and out through the narrow rim of the orchard, the gnarly, ragged limbs of which, with many a

creaking caress, touch the black roof of the old school-house. A moment more, and a stout, rifted fire-stick from the dilapidated wood-house has been placed against the school-house wall, beneath the window. With a stout push and lift, the lower sash is up, and, scrambling over the narrow sill, I am master of the situation, with leisure to select the choicest seat, which was, all things considered, the one in the "back row" that flanked the boys' side of the middle aisle.

It was a severely plain room, and in those days I thought it large, with windows on its sides and one end, affording an abundance of light from the east, south, and west. A half-dozen tiers of seats, and two-thirds as many rows, with a trio of narrow, sharply slanting aisles between, running out, or rather downward, to the open floor, comprised the larger part of the interior. In the open space, a huge, cast-iron stove, with bulging sides and cracked top, is perched, none too solidly, upon three rickety, crooked iron legs of its own, and for the other leg a single brick stood on end; its score of rusty funnel-joints were wired high up the ceiling, that, with many a sharp angle, hugs the incline of its steep pitch-roof above. This stove, with its brick hearth, took up a deal of room, as every reciting class realized, with its homely body ruddy with its roaring fire. In the right-hand corner, by the single entrance to the school-room,

the door to which was minus its two lower panels and otherwise in a dilapidated condition, was the somewhat imposing desk of the teacher, with its imitation mahogany graining, its dusky color being in marked contrast to the cold iron-gray of the more humble desks and wainscoting about the room. It is a short step, however, from these plebeian ranks of gray-painted pine-seats to the consulship of this bucolic empire, as I myself realized, as, sitting in this self-same mahogany-colored desk a few years later, I looked outward to the upturned, questioning urchin-faces, not as a culprit in disgrace, but as one of the royal line of Pedagogues who had lent their labor and their fame to make this domicile of learning illustrious among its local kindred, as it really was. It was, however, with an entirely different sensation that I met the mute, inquiring gaze of my former mates, but now subjects, in which was concentrated the essence of friendly interest and curious speculation, from that pervading my heart on this bright winter morning when my prospective labors and enforced study-hours excited only pleasurable anticipations, when Care was no more a reality than the most improbable of Grecian myths, and when Ambition, instead of Necessity, drove on the "box."

From this roughly battered door, the long Dunce's seat ran across the end of the room, and

above it was the old black-board, with dusty face, white like a miller's hat, cut and scratched with many a queerly carven hieroglyphic, and sadly warped, its dents and cracks filled with pulverized whiteness. In one corner of this once ebony-hued bit of rustic school-furniture is a chalk picture of a house, with volumes of imaginary smoke coming out of its chimney, a legendary rooster, and family pig, all drawn in the uncertain perspective of childhood. A pig is as much an adjunct of this type of art as it is a part and parcel of the Penates of some households, where the pigs and children sleep together. Simplicity is a quality native to the rustic heart, if nowhere else.

Turning the sharp angle of the adjacent corner of the room, this famous seat, hated by the little lads and lasses as sincerely as were the pillory and stocks by their Colonial ancestors, runs from thence under the shadowy sill of a westward-looking window to meet the descending row of desks that flank the inner wall. The severe lines and angular architecture of this interior had little of attractiveness, but the rather bespoke the sturdy, virile quality of rustic civilization at the beginning of the present century.

It was the work of only a few moments to kindle a fire, and the blue smoke from the low chimney was a swift signal for the gathering of the clans. A short half-hour later and every

youngster within the radius of a long, hilly mile had stormed over the threshold, slippery with introdden snow. The last tardy comer found his choice of a seat like Hobson's choice of a horse, — that or none; but there was always more or less of swapping and dickering among the boys, in such matters, and, before the teacher came in sight over the village knoll, by a dint of coaxing and lively barter, many an exchange of seat had taken place, and a buzz of satisfaction had settled over this heterogeneous community.

The young man who is to teach the school this winter is a college student, and a stranger to the people in the district. A month ago, we knew his name, since when Dame Gossip has been busy settling his pedigree to the satisfaction of the greater part of the community, and what was lacking in actual knowledge has been supplied by a lively conjecture. The verdict is a favorable one, and the young fellow is started on the wave to popularity already. What antics were cut up in this brief hour of waiting, of jumping the broom-stick down the aisle, of kicking at a chalk mark on the wall, or of crossing the room hand over hand along the brown hemlock beam overhead, all in a bedlam of noise that only forty throats can make in combined vociferation. Out in the long entry, some of the larger boys pitch old-fashioned copper cents at a square of numerals

chalked out upon the dirty spruce floor, and, mayhap tired with that sort of exercise, climb the narrow scuttle upon an exploring expedition into the attic. With what envious hearts the small boys watched these burly fellows disappear, one by one, into the dark shadows of this, to them, unknown, mysterious region! What wonderful pictures of horses and cattle one boy used to draw upon the black-board, to the great amusement of the girls and small boys, who crowded about as he worked with a broken bit of chalk! But it is nine o'clock by the "brummagem" bull's-eye watch of one of the scholars.

"Here comes the teacher!"

"Here he comes!"

"That's him!"

These and kindred exclamations, from nearly every voice in the room, make the gamut of expression, and what a queer jumble of sound it is! A bevy of little girls, with hearts as warm and big as themselves, run down the road to offer a childish welcome.

"Good-morning, teacher!" the girls say, in concert, and half his apprehension has disappeared at this omen of good-fortune, but it is with strangely quivering nerve that this college stripling turns from the narrow track of the snowy highway toward the school-house door. The pandemonium of the last half-hour is stilled. The

scholars are in their seats as the master enters; then all rise together, standing silent, demure, and curious, to make, a moment later, their awkward bows, — a good old custom then in vogue, that included in its courtesy the school committee, much as were dreaded the calls, periodically made, by those dignitaries.

"Good-morning, teacher!"

"Good-morning!" is the half-audible reply; and, removing his hat and coat, the school-work is begun. Every eye watches the teacher intently as, with quick, nervous movement, he takes up the well worn Testament.

"We will read the first chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel. The boy in the corner will read the first verse."

The reading begins in a strained, timorous way, but in a few minutes the voices settle down to their natural tone. Half the scholars have left their Testaments at home, as a matter of course, and read over the shoulder of their boyish neighbor, or remain silent. What a queer mixture! Deep bass, gruff as a burr-saw, or rich with clear, musical note; contraltos, clear as crystal, and bell-toned sopranos mingling with shrill, childish treble; for there are not a few excellent voices here, as a visit to the winter singing-school would show. In this reading not a line is exempt. Scholar after scholar wrestles with these strange Biblical

names, the best pronunciation of which is but a sort of lingual twist, a contortion articulate of sound; but, nothing daunted, the mass of Hebrew genealogy is gone through, and the closing line read. The upper corner of the leaf is turned down, and the Testaments are put away until the next morning. It is an anxious ordeal, ending in a spell of awkward silence; the interim that hangs ever upon the heels of an initiatory step, but one that is soon ended in this case. The mutual survey by brown desk and gray is over. With a lead-pencil and sheet of paper, the teacher goes up one side of the aisle, and down the other, — the girls' side first, — taking the names and ages of each scholar; and then the classes are called, the largest first. Each boy and girl is interrogated as to his or her progress at the close of the preceding term, and by the time this preliminary work is accomplished, the little bell tinkles the signal for the girls' recess, and out they go, without order or priority, with hasty step on the part of the little ones, and with more dignity and grace on the part of the older misses, of whom there are many. What a subdued buzz is going on out in the entry! The jury is out, the master thinks. What would he give to hear the discussion going on behind those thin pine panels, as he catches a merry peal of laughter, clear and musical, and full of good-nature rather than derision. The bell rings

again, and one by one they file in, in their neat, linsey-woolsey gowns of drab, indigo, and acorn color, their home-made shoes of stout calfskin, tanned soft almost as glove-leather, making a not over-sharp staccato along the white floor, as they take their seats. The teacher reads the verdict written upon the pleasant, interested faces, and takes courage. With the girls on his side, there is no fear of failure. The boys have gone out, and are less noisy than might have been expected. Some of the smaller boys come in, and stand about the stove, warming themselves, some of whom, with an outcropping spirit of mischief, have brought in tiny balls of snow, to drop them one by one on the stove until the hiss and sputter have attracted the teacher's attention; with big round eyes they watch the teacher as he assists one of the larger girls at her example. He is under a severer fire than before, but he is easy and clear in his explanation, and ready in the performance of this most difficult example in the arithmetic, putting to shame the thought, and mantling with burning blushes the fair cheek, of his pupil, who had sought to put his knowledge to the test; but her embarrassment goes unnoticed, and the fair-haired girl thanks him from the bottom of her heart, and vows unquestioning allegiance from this moment. The boys are all in without the ringing of the bell, which augurs well

for the new master. Hardly is he in the floor by his desk, and a stalwart arm is up. It is the last danger-signal. This time it is a puzzle in *Double Proportion* that is to be unravelled, and it is done successfully; but it does not stop here. Retaliation is in order, and the first class in arithmetic is called into the floor. The fellow who began at *Double Proportion* is asked to put upon the blackboard an example, and therewith explain the method of finding the *Least Common Multiple;* which, after a waste of chalk, and a greater waste of time, he admits himself unable to do, while the fair-haired girl does herself credit in the performance of the task allotted to her. The merited chagrin of the one is as noticeable as the pleased elation of the other. The examination of the teacher has ended without comment; but the supplementary school committee has earned a place on the Dunce's seat, which the generosity and diplomacy of the master does not allow him to occupy. The remedy is a severe one, but is administered with wholesome effect. The teacher turns interviewer with a vengeance. The scholars who wanted to begin where they "left off last term," and go right ahead, are set back two-score pages or more, and the review work begins. The young men and women are docile enough, glad to be rid of a test that might bring ignominious failure. These preliminaries over, and the first

outcropping of boyish mischief nipped in the bud with a firm hand, the master is supreme. His new subjects respect him already.

The winter noon comes quickly, and the tin-pails, filled to their respective brims with doughnuts and cheese, mince-pie, and withal a big greening apple, with smooth, glossy skin, and single bruised spot, where it fell from ripened twig to the rocks in the old wall, or yellow russet, with rough, tough rind, its pulp solid as ever an apple could be, with its acidulous crystals close-knit together, for dessert, are brought out from the mysterious recesses of these cavernous desks, and, amid the rattling of their metal covers, — a homely music enough, with its broken rhythm and a constant clatter of tongues, — the luncheons disappear, and the hour speeds swiftly away. What acrobatic feats follow the putting-up of these dinner-pails! What boyish squabbles and wrestlings, and rubbing of faces with the freezing snow, by victor and vanquished, took place out-of-doors, between the athletes of this rustic university! and what jumpings — square-footed, hop, skip, and a jump, and leap-frog — and battles with flying snow-balls made up its entertainment! But the most laughable of all these antics was the "French wrestle," where the boys, with arms and legs interlocked, rolled up and down the narrow floor, backward and forward, in the rude trial

of their strength. How bright those halcyon moments were, within the warmth and glow of this noisy room, the

"Squares of sunshine on the floor"

not a bit brighter than the faces of these hoyden children! But all this changed in a twinkling; where a moment before was boisterous mirth is now only the occasional clang of a falling slate and the buzz of busy lips whispering their lessons to themselves, and the sing-song of the reading-classes as, each in turn, they file out into the front seats. So the day goes, and, soon over, the sunset flashes its ruddy light through the western window-panes, flooding the room with a warm, mellow splendor, as the long spelling-class is called out, the last to recite, the last word in the long list is spelled; the master rings his bell, and, with a startling whoop, the children storm over the outer threshold, and hasten homeward to tell their mother what a fine teacher they have.

So go the days, as the winter weaves its frosty rime deeper and deeper, until the first winds of March blow the snow into more fantastic shapes, filling the country roads with impassable drifts, hiding the fences and walls out of sight, when the school is over for the winter, and the work at

the huge wood-pile, back of the long wood-shed, is begun. The books are packed snugly away, in their accustomed corner in the old cupboard, where it is not improbable that they will remain untouched for another year. The school-days soon grow unreal in the hard work of the farm, and fade away into the far land of dreams.

III.

Occasionally, in later years, I find myself following the trend of the old highway, down over the hill, through the shadow and bloom of the orchard-trees along their boundary of mossy stone wall; down through the village, with its less than a score of quiet-like white houses and homely thrift, to turn sharply around one of its four corners, where, spiritless and almost deserted, sits the old grocery-store, the scene of many a boyish prank, with its sagging ridge-pole and shattered chimney-top, its windows curtained with cobwebs finer than the rarest of filmy Madras; its narrow panes, ancient and greenish-hued, and brown with a generation of dust, and etched with many a downward streak of melting winter frost or summer rain, the insignia of a ripe old age, to go a bit farther on, to stand at last upon the roughly quarried steps of this *Alma Mater* of earlier boyhood days, to feel again

"the gleams and glooms that dart
Across the school-boy's brain;
The song and silence in the heart
That in part are prophecies, and in part
Are longings wild and vain."

To pass this low portal, once so familiar, is to breathe again the buoyant airs of far-away days. How cramped and shorn of their once rude comforts these old scarred desks! how short and steep the incline of these three worn pathways between! The years are swept away before the rushing torrent of my thought, and it is with half-expectant look I search for some familiar face, but fruitlessly, — the faces are all new and unfamiliar. The same roughly plastered walls, dingy and smoke-stained, the same worn desks of pine are here, marred with many a flinty pencil-mark and coarsely cut initial, some of them quaint, touching memorials of those whose hill-side dwellings have door-ways of stone or marble, but

"There are things of which I may not speak;
There are dreams that cannot die;
There are thoughts that make the strong heart weak,
And bring a pallor to the cheek
And a mist before the eye."

The heart-throbs quicken under the potent spell of these homely surroundings. Sitting in the old-time seat again, the olden desk before me, — the title to which has passed from one generation to

another so frequently by the mere act of abandonment, a simple enough conveyance, — I count across its sloping top ink-stains and knife-marks, a score or more, and which I readily translate into many a story of stirring episode and boyish adventure.

This notch, midway the smoothly rounded edge, marked the boundary line of my possessions, and on the hither side of which I did my mental ploughing and sowing. These clumsily carven figures mark the date of an unmerited chastisement at the hand of a master whose courage and manliness were ever at a low ebb in the school-room, whatever may have been their quality elsewhere. I see him now as then, tall and closely knit, with stooping shoulders, sombre-browed, with dusky, slumberous eyes, the depths of which glow with pent-up, angry passion, his teeth tightly shut as if battling with his ill concealed choler; his whole air that of distrust, as he leans with his elbow athwart the broad moulding of his desk, face to face with his school, feared and detested by boy and girl alike. I can never forget him, for, like Banquo's ghost, Memory will not down at the bidding. I feel the coarse strand of cotton twine tighten about my fingers as my mate deftly takes the "cat's-cradle" from them — fingers younger and smaller than his own by almost ten years — with an unfortunate movement that betrays his sport.

What swift vengeance followed its betrayal! He, a strapping fellow of twenty, went unscathed, while the stripling boy was made a scapegoat of another's mischievous folly. A clenched fist is raining blows upon my head and shoulders, that send the lesser culprit staggering blindly down the aisle. Oh, the cowardice of that assault! — an insult never forgiven, never forgotten!

Many a soft, decayed apple, thrown with unerring aim by some daring and discourteous youngster, left its dripping stain upon the broadcloth coat of this teacher, for whom none had a sincere regard, when his back, more welcome than his scowling face, afforded a good target; the culmination of all which was a pitched battle with a plucky insurbordinate, a barely won victory for the master, and a demoralized school, which, for the remainder of the term, like the "brood of the Dragon," paid more attention to mischief than to any legitimate study.

Many a time, sitting here in the waning light of the winter afternoon, I have waited impatiently for the closing of the school, only that I might hurry home to a plain supper of hominy and milk, a hearty but homely repast, and to the doing of the chores about the house, the most important of which was the bringing-in the wood for the night, the rifted sticks of beech, maple, and oak, with a big basket of fat pitch-knots, the whole skil-

fully stacked against the massive jamb of the wide-mouthed fireplace, to hasten back, in the swift-gathering darkness, to the school-house, from every window of which shone the flickering "light of other days," the spindling tallow "dip" — a really brilliant illumination from the highway. We boys used to carry each a "dip," or candle, on these occasions, and it did not matter for candlesticks as we had a very simple method of fastening it to the desk, by first lighting our wick, then dripping hot tallow upon the desk-top, and then planting the butt of the candle in the melted mass before it had time to cool. Sometimes we carried a small block of wood in which had been bored a hole with the "maple-tree auger," a simple enough contrivance, though possessing somewhat an air of pretentiousness, for those boys who brought candlesticks were accused of putting on airs without hesitation. Every scholar in the "Spurwink District" is here, and there are, as well, large accessions from the adjoining districts. It is the first "spellin'-school" for the winter. What an animated picture, this conglomerate of humanity, for here are old and young crowding about the stove, the aisles and seats, in busily talking groups, a modern Babel in a mild form. Hearty guffaws and ringing peals of laughter greet the scintillant falchion of the village wit, or follow swiftly the perpetration of some practical joke upon the dul-

lard bumpkin of the neighborhood. What a glow of summer sunshine reflects from these faces, half in shadow and half in light, a combination of animate movement and chiaroscuro that would delight the heart of a Rembrandt. It is a strongly Rembrandtesque scene, with its flaring, sputtering candles, its feeble lights and sombre effects; but they were famous nights, bubbling to the brim with merriment, ill concealed pride, or witless failure as the varied performance in these orthoepic contests afforded.

The sharp staccato of the ferule upon the teacher's desk is the signal for silence, a silence that for a moment is only disturbed by the brisk crackling of the fire in the stove, or the rattling of the loose sash as the gusty winds go scouring past, thick with drifting snow. The sound sends a chill down the spine, and a weird, uncanny moan it is, dying away into the faintest whisper, to slowly return to the shrill pitch of a moment before in a series of crescendos and diminuendos, fascinating both ear and sense in the singular beauty of its tone and rhythm. These nocturnes of the night-winds in midwinter touch the heart with a wonderful power, tuning up the slackened chords and giving them stronger impulses, larger scope and expression. Nature always pitches the tone, whatever the heart-song may be. The noisy flame goes roaring up the long, rusty funnel in its

haste to catch up with the wind, peeping out here and there, on its journey, through the cracks in the sagging joints, its eyes bloodshot with repressed anger. What romance of the breezy hills and leafy woodlands is here! what songs of far-flown birds, and hints of sky and scudding cloud-shadow, that, like countless harmonics, make a grand score of summer song, to swell with tumultuous flood through the heart, out of this simple note of crackling flame!

The teacher has trimmed the smoky wick to his candle, cutting it off with his sharp-bladed knife against his desk as one would the fuzzy end of a string. The leaders of the respective sides draw lots for the first choice from this heterogeneous assemblage of differing ages, sex, and talent, taking their places, each side opposite the other, at the head of each outer aisle, and, one by one, as they are called, the best spellers array themselves down the aisles, face to face, and so the alternate choice goes on, the poorer spellers chosen last, a process much after the fashion of sorting potatoes, — in which quality, rather than size, is sought for, — until the ranks are full, or until the floor fails to accommodate the lengthening line. The teacher gives out the words from Webster's Speller, those of one and two syllables at first, to be followed later on by those longer and more difficult with their various combinations of silent

letter and troublesome diphthong. This is the preliminary skirmish. Each is on the alert to see how his neighbor fares, and with what swift, perfect enunciation the words come, flying to right and left, like so many bullets, only to be caught and sent back with equal celerity. — With never a miss? Oh no! for some of them are returned as misshapen as if they were real bullets, flattened and dented with the force of their blow.

"Tally! — a mark, score," says the master.

"T–a–l–l–e–y," is the blundering response.

Down sits the biggest, oldest boy in the school, in the midst of a silence that is worse than a round of loud-mouthed jeers, to have a small boy opposite spell the word correctly, and to see, a moment later, the best speller in his aisle cross over to the other side as a forfeit for his ignorance, or, at best, heedless mishap. So the sport goes on, until but two or three are left upon their feet, to wrestle with such heterographic puzzles as abound in English orthography. What laughable episodes occur in swift succession in this rustic comedy! — a "Comedy of Errors," indeed, that is not ended until the single remaining actor on this narrow stage stops the play from sheer weariness, to be congratulated by his acquaintance as the champion orthoepist of the occasion. But the best part of the "spellin'-match" is to come with the blowing-out of the candles, when matches of

an entirely different sort are in order; where Emulation fools with the keen shafts in Cupid's quiver, and the only trophies are sightless scars, that hurt none the less because they are hidden from sight. The "going home with the girls" is rare entertainment, but it takes a deal of courage and gallantry to "make love," with the atmosphere at twenty below zero, with the wind, that cuts the cheek like a lash, leaping field, fence, and highway in a boisterous sort of a way, that makes one's skirts and tippet-ends snap like a whip-cord, and sends the whirling snow along the narrow highway in blinding clouds. It was enjoyable, all the same, but more so on becalmed winter nights, with the sky studded with starry splendor, with smoothly trodden roads, over which we coast half the way homeward. Love never looks at the thermometer at such times. His garments are impervious to wet: and, insensible to cold, he walks or rides happy in his own conceit. The barometers that men consult in forecasting fair or foul weather, and that hang, most like, upon the lintel of the old porch-door, tell idle tales to lovers. A weathercock of doubtful happenings wins more appealing glances from these dabsters in the Ovidian game, where all the cards are hearts, where hearts are trumps, and where "deuces" take the "game," or "knaves" get oftentimes the largest share.

It is a delightful change, when to step out of the impoverished air of the school-room into the silent winter moonlight, the crisp, singing snow, and frosty, nipping weather, with all the landscape sparkling with crystallized cold, is to have every nerve set a-tingling with a shock from these subtle batteries of Nature that follow in the track of the bleak winds of the Northland; when every indrawn breath is pregnant with a peculiarly pleasing sense of exhilaration, and when every footstep steals new vigor from the snowy pathway. One feels at such a time as if he could make the journey of the world, so active are these forces of Infinity, claiming kinship with Life. The rare beauty of such a glorious night-tide, flooded with the brilliance of the "full-orbed" goddess flashing from the stiffened sprays of the road-side weeds and sprawling alder-bushes; from feathery hackmatack and gray birch, huge clusters of emeralds, — the snow beneath one's feet a very bed of jewels, and every suspiration a sip of vitalized nectar, — is, beyond compare, one of the richest, most intoxicating delights to which the most exacting lover of Nature may aspire. The higher thoughts and lessons in life that are stored away in the differing phases of Nature, as she reveals them, one after another, in the visions of beauties that lie far outside the domain of articulate expression, her summer and winter

pictures throbbing with life, are never uncovered to some people, knit as they are into the very fibre of human existence. How strong the warp and woof of the skies, the green earth, the sobbing rains, and bare, tossing branches of the trees, the slow-falling snow-flakes throwing their crystal coverlets over the hills, and the bright, health-giving sunshine, and how sustaining their influences in the varied needs of humanity! I have heard of an affliction called color-blindness: I think there is such a thing as beauty-blindness. I pity those people who are afflicted with the latter. To them, on such a night as this, the rounding glory of the moon is no more than a huge kerosene lantern hung in the sky to light them through the sleepy valleys or over the stony hills, wherever the crooked country highways may take them. It is more a source of material profit than of inspiration. It is, as well, an excellent aid to them on summer nights, when the long days are hardly long enough for the haymaker, who steals his thrift from Sleep. These swirling waves of bracing oxygen, doubly rarefied in the laboratories of the sky, laden with frosty pellicles, are suggestive of bodily discomfort, of frost-bitten ears and noses, and the thousand and one freaks of which poor mischievous Jack Frost is guilty. To me they sing sweet songs of the upper world, charming the Soul into willing silence; else they

play a weird, stirring music that sets each strand of this wonderful web of breathing, speaking, listening animation, the human body, to dancing Irish jigs and hornpipes. What a juggler with the senses is this Spirit of the Winter!

This old school-house was the scene of many a frolic and heart-burning. It was here that the singing-school came on Friday nights. And what a strange medley of sound broke over the single hemlock girder, that spanned the centre of the room, after the singing-master had chalked a staff across the face of the big black-board, filling the broad spaces between with big white dots for notes, until the gamut was complete, as, with his violin, he pitched the tone of C natural, with the direction, "Sing! Do——o," when every voice essayed the dolorous task, making the very violin-strings shiver among the broken shafts of tone that went flying about the room, and no two together! Rap-rap goes the fiddle-bow on the back of its much-to-be-pitied companion, — "Once more! Do—o." "Do–o–o—o," it comes in undulating waves, with something more of harmony than before; and the master, with sharp staccato accent, in which lingers a suspicion of disgust, says, "Better!" There are some old singers here, but the majority are beginners, some of whom have no more idea of a tone and no more musical sense than a stick of wood, and what wooden work they

make of it! After an exhaustive explanation of the staff, its importance in one way and another, the scale is exemplified and rewritten, and then comes the singing, "do, re, mi," until its top is reached; when we go back over the way we came in a series of halting tones, as if each note were a rung in an imaginary ladder. There was many a long breath of satisfaction, as one after another got back to the starting-place; as if it was really a perilous descent, made with many a quavering and rest.

I always felt, after such an evening, that the master earned his stipend; but whether some of these would-be songsters got the worth of their money was a debatable question. Twelve lessons made up the quarter, that was soon over, and quite a respectable singing-class was turned out as a result. The last night of all, after the recess was over, the Lord of Misrule held sway, and the "doings" and "goings-on" of young and old made the night a memorable one in the district annals. The debating club made up the trio of these homely entertainments, and many a burst of rustic eloquence has rolled and surged about these narrow walls in the discussion of such momentous questions as attracted the attention of thinking people in those days. These dusty gray walls, like those of many another old school-house, are pregnant with abundant and pleasing reminis-

cence, and speak as with living voices, telling the homely story over and over again of childhood's happy hours.

"Strange to me now are the forms I meet
When I visit the dear old town:
But the native air is pure and sweet,
And the trees that o'ershadow each well known street,
As they balance up and down,
Are singing the beautiful song,
Are singing and whispering still"

the old-time greetings, and many a clearly limned sketch, the counterpart of long ago, is here to arouse its recollections: —

"A school-boy, with his kite
Gleaming in a sky of light
And an eager upward look:
Steeds pursued through lane and field;
Fowlers with their snares concealed,
And an angler by a brook,"—

a-weaving out of the new the old, old spell. The old road is here; so is the big bowlder under the mongrel apple-tree by the pasture-bars; the old knoll is here, but the ancient well-sweep has fallen among the hard-hack bushes, whose dry, dun-colored plumes, laden with snow in winter, cover it with tender compassion. The red and yellow painted farm-houses, along the village road, look as weather-worn as they did thirty years ago; and the rails in the roadside fences are only a little

more deeply frescoed with yellowish green lichens; the fringe of birch-bushes has been cut away, but the highway seems very narrow for all that, hardly wider than the narrowest street in my metropolitan home. In the village, the old-time houses are here; only one is missing, the oldest landmark of them all. How I miss the old house! It is a Rip Van Winkle sort of a place — a Sleepy Hollow, rather; where the echo of the outside world, and its busy schemes, rarely come to disturb, and where a new house is as much of an event, and as full of local anticipation and interest, as a long expected meteor, the coming of which sets whole nations agog with curious discussion.

There is hardly ever any change, outside its personality, in the rustic belongings of an essentially farming community. The boys come up in the old-fashioned mental-training way, with the same characteristics as their fathers had before them; sturdy, self-reliant, and unconventional in the naturalness with which they carry their man and womanhood, to go to the college, the busy commercial centres, and to the workshops of the great corporations. Rarely do they return to the old homestead and the old hill-sides, unless to find a big, out-door breathing-space, and a few days of genuine, restful quiet; or a tramp in the meadows, or among the lowland shadows that hide the lurking-places of the red-spotted trout; or a few

days among the covers of the shy partridge, carpeted with the brownest and shiniest of pine-needles.

The census-taker compares one decade with another with but little satisfaction. There is neither increase nor decrease in this rustic population. The impoverished farms, handed down from father to son, with their ancient brown roofs, lie asleep among the hazy hills; and the faces, every one not less familiar, peering from window and door-way, greet his coming with the half-curious interest and familiarity that old acquaintance ever asserts. It is always safe to inquire after the young people at the city, for they are not all here. Life would be less real were not this transplanting process a continual one; for it is an ebb-tide that washes against the feet of these wooded hills, carrying on its outward flow the stanchest and bravest of their youth, and bringing nothing in return. The depletion is constant. The number of scholars in a given district does not vary from year to year, and a crowded country school-house is a rarity. The old seats easily accommodate the incoming generation. New feet may walk the narrow deck of this training-ship, but there is ample room for the drill; for, no sooner do the young sailors become experts in the use of mental cutlass and pike than they depart for the conflict. The metropolis takes the stoutest-hearted and

most ambitious of the country lads, and where the lads go the lassies follow. Every advanced school is a recruiting-station for the stalwart worker in the broader career of metropolitan life; for the woodland-shadowed valleys and rugged, sun-browned hill-slopes of New England are the nurseries of the highest type of humanity; and it is a mighty race of men and women whose first indrawn breath was the perfumed summer breeze, or the snow-laden winds of winter, mayhap tempered by the ruddy glow of the big-mouthed fireplace; and whose swathing-bands were of home-made woollen, prickly with cockle-burrs from the farm-garden; whose first bed was the homely heirloom of unpainted pine, which had rocked a half a dozen of their progenitors within its flaring arms and clumsy wooden hood, lulled into soft slumber by the old timepiece that has for long years sung a ceaseless monody of

"Forever, never; never, forever,"

against its rudely timbered walls. I never go to this Sleepy Hollow among the hills, but I visit this Mecca of many a boyish pilgrimage; this old brick school-house of the country-side, with its memories of homely, truthful ways and simple living, but I feel the stronger and better for the thoughts it always inspires, and there comes with

it the tender consideration that is akin to true filial affection. Every heart has its Mecca. This is mine; and I am a devout worshipper at its homely shrine.

RUNNING WATER.

RUNNING WATER.

ALMOST every farm has its adjacent wood-lot, its pasture woodland, and somewhere within its leafy recesses is hidden its green-girt, tree-shadowed watering-place, where, in the hot summer days, the cattle go to drink, and to stand knee-deep in the cooling stream. It is the focus of all the woodland ways. If one is much accustomed to wandering in strange woods, he will most likely find himself following some one of these sinuous trails made by the cattle, and how abundant in charming surprises they are! A country road is one thing, but a cattle-path is quite another. Along the white line of the highway, one is rarely out of sight of brown-roofed homesteads, snugly ensconced amid their rugged orchard-trees, or at least within sight of their red chimney-tops. He is rarely beyond the suggestions of the fence-builder and road-maker. Man is well enough in his place, but one sometimes finds the solitude of the woods as delightful as association with his own species. One is hardly satisfied if he is not harnessed to something of work or pur-

suit; but when the harness chafes, it is irksome to bear. I do not wonder that men like to get away from their own kind and to forget that there are other people in the world; and, once within the domain of the road-makers of the pasture-woods, the harness drops from one as he would lay down a burden, and life is begun anew.

Out in the world "all roads lead to Rome," so some one has said, but here all roads lead to the shady covert of the ever-bubbling spring. One sits in his house, and, by the light of his kerosene lamp, reads of what others have seen as they have journeyed up and down through the world, without a tithe of the pleasure that a visual experience would have brought, while another is reading for himself the stories Nature has written, in coarser lines, but with vastly more power and intelligence, in a neighboring field. It does people a deal of good to gad a bit on their own account, but it is better to gad with one's self for company, or, at most, with some one whose soul is not less perfectly tuned to out-door sight and sound than your own. As Mr. Burroughs says, one "may sit by his fireside and make wonderful voyages;" so one may sit in his narrow door-way, and watch the procession of the round year, but there is no zest in such entertainment. The convict in his cell, the single window of which looks out upon the earth, may do the same, but it gives

him no taste of the vigorous strength and fulness of being that might be his, were he able, like others, to go and come at will along Nature's highways. One gets tired of constant looking. There is a desire to feel an object as to see it. It is one thing to watch the snow-buntings picking the crumbs from the snow, where they have been dropped by the housewife in her shaking of the table-cloth, and another to have these self-same birds eat from your hand. One likes to feel that he is a part of the great flood of natural life that is ever surging against his door-step. There is a sense of exhilaration in the mere feeling of the blowing winds. I hold up my hands, and the winds go between my wide-spread fingers like the moist threads from a great reel that is being swiftly unwound. It is sensation, the expression of a fact in Nature. One's knowledge of a bee is wonderfully expanded after he has trifled with its weapon of offence. A taste of wild turnip, which you will find almost anywhere in the woods, will furnish food for several moments of deep thought, and you will realize what a superfluous amount of "chain-lightning" can be done up in very small and innocent-looking bundles by Nature. In acquiring out-door information, all the senses must be on the alert, and, in some sense, trained to their work. Do you wish to know how cold it is where your thermometer hangs on the outer

sash of your window? If you do, don't satisfy yourself with a glance from within at the instrument, but step outside into the nipping air, take a half a dozen deep breaths, take a bite of the clean, wind-driven snow into your mouth, the taste of winter itself, and your fire will look outward to you with a more cheerful greeting upon your return into the house. The thermometer speaks a dead language. Its translations are mere arbitrary signs; but the North winds talk in a native dialect: their speech is that of the mother-tongue. People make a great mistake in their shrinking from a hand-shake with Nature. She grips hard, oftentimes, but it is the mother holding to her child.

Rain is wet; but if you wish to know it as the corn-leaves do, stand out amid the falling drops and let them teach you the fact. I have seen, in a certain well written essay on farm-life, that one of its occupations was the "shaving" of "hemlock shingles." I never heard of a hemlock shingle until I read that essay, and I doubt if its writer ever saw one. Of all tree-things that grow in the woods the hemlock is the poorest in the quality of its building material. It is excellent for rough boarding, and for framing timber, for joists and sills and rafters, but the old houses are built of pine. It is only in these days of impoverished forests that the hemlock has a marketable value.

Its bark is worth more to the tanner than its shaky butt-log is to the lumberman. Did you ever drive a six-penny nail into a hemlock board near its end? Try it once, and see if its coarse fibre does not pull apart and leave an unsightly split along its rough length. The sun warps it into ungainly shape, and the rain completes its ruin. A hemlock shingle would not stand a single summer month of heat and wet. Spruce and fir have been made into shingles, but they are not much better. Cedar and pine, free of sap, make the roof-coverings that grow old with the century. Men learn these things by experience, by working with their keen axes in the midwinter snows, and beside the growling saws in the mills, and upon the roofs of houses, and by living under them, for that matter.

One who takes everything for granted and who never makes any explorations for himself, whose thoughts fit like a tongue into a groove that some other person has made for him, finds himself stuck fast with every change in the weather. Open eyes and open ears pave the way to knowledge, and place one upon the best of terms with Nature. One likes to live upon good terms with his neighbor; but until he finds out for himself what his neighbor is of kindliness and thrift, his respect for him is without foundation. In either case, a thorough acquaintance is the first condition.

There are some kinds of acquaintance that come with gadding that are hardly profitable, but Nature is the mother of a gadding race, and to know her gadders best, for their fellowship is a rich one, her fields and woods are to be scoured by day and by night, through every day in the year. Nature is the ideal of the picturesque; nor is she unthrifty, for she makes ample provision for all her children, for mental and bodily entertainment alike. When the world was new, people lived out-of-doors more than in these latter days, and the influences of such living gave man a larger frame and tendinous quality. The rude Roman became the conqueror of the world, and in a later century the Gauls swept down from their northern fastnesses to overthrow the Franks in turn. Then came the children of mighty Thor upon their voyage of conquest; but, when Civilization came, these rude children of Nature were overthrown, not because they were deficient in strength and bravery, but because Civilization put new weapons into the hands of her warriors, weapons borrowed from Nature herself.

The same instinct leads men to-day away from the beaten paths into ways trodden only by animate nature, and untrodden by the masses of men. The wigwam is still the ideal of a lover of outdoor life. Thoreau's cabin in Concord woods was the next thing to it, and the record of the simple

thought it afforded and its beautiful surroundings has made it a charmed spot. The red man, breathing the aroma of the pine-boughs, and with it their health and healing, paddling along his streams of silver in summer, and in midwinter tramping over his snowy fields on his home-made shoes of hoop-bent ash with the net-work of interwoven green-hide cut from the skin of some fleet-footed deer, drinking at every breath the sinew-strengthening wine of his northern winds, was a true child of Nature. His manly stature and his dusky comeliness were God-given. What a freedom was his, and what a contrast between this aboriginal man and the flower of society-civilization of to-day! A man longs for the sight of this child of the woods, for something that stands for strength and native freshness, for tense sinew and supple movement, at the appearance of the dude. There is something in the heart of man that revolts at the presence of one of these limp specimens of humankind, and from which one is apt to turn away with ill-concealed pity.

Why do men persist in relying upon their tailor for the impression they hope to make upon their surrounding fellows! I wonder if these young men who hide their necks within a hoop of laundered linen, that touches their chins, ever thought of the neck as the shaft that God made for the capstone of the head! There is grace and power

in the neck of a man, as there is a rare beauty in the neck of a woman. Why should men deform themselves at the expense of the strong lines and sturdy physique that are their glory? I have heard of men's wearing corsets, and I have thought it a pity the Almighty could not remodel them into women, only that the women might object, and justly too, to any such additions to their sex. I apprehend that if God was satisfied with Adam, he would not recognize in this later production much that was in the Omnipotent mind when the first tenant was created for the Garden of Eden. The Indian, in his leather buskins and untaught grace, would be the more creditable companion. Artificiality is the bane of living to-day. A dug-out is better than a palace. Nature is a better mother than Fashion. Boulevards and professionally laid-out parks and gardens, with their smooth driveways and parterres of hot-house flowers, find scant place in a heart that has tasted the delights of moss-covered rocks, whose upholstery is softer than the pile of velvet, that knows well the woodland's

> "secret places
> And the nests in hedge and tree,"—

that has learned the rhythmic legends of the brooks in the meadows, and that has rested awhile beside their droswy pools, aflame with the glowing tints

of October's royal foliage, each liquid-filled cup a palette strewn with sun-made pigments. Such turns away from the human imitation as from an empty feasting-board. It is a matter of regret that the *Rococo* style of exaggeration finds so many admirers among people of whom we have a right to expect better intelligence and better things. Why not do as artists do with their brushes? Why not take Nature for a teacher? "Painting is Nature seen through the prism of an emotion," and we are largely creatures of our emotions; if we do not use the brush, we can use our thought to preface speech and example. Put all sham behind. Insist on quality. Paste is one thing, but the real diamond is quite another when you wish to purchase. Oh, for the hidden depths of the stalwart woodlands, where the grosser self is lost in the spirituality of Nature, away from the beaten roads of humanity to the haunts of the thrush and clownish cat-bird, where are hosts of acquaintance, of whose presence and speech I never tire!

Among the woods of New England which possess the most pleasing character are the *Coniferæ*, the pines, spruces, and firs, that stand out so warmly beautiful and suggestive in the winter landscape, and so coolly inviting on a hot summer afternoon. One sees much to attract and interest at every step along the cow-paths and indistinct woodland-trails which intersect each other

at short intervals, no matter what direction he may take. Through the broad acres that made up the old homestead-farm, there ran, lengthwise, a high ridge, which overlooked the surrounding country for miles. On one side the fields slope regularly down to the lowlands, losing themselves across the white barrier of the ancient highway, in the scrubby ferns and dwarf thorns of the clearing always known, since I can remember, as the "home-pasture," whose inner margin was bounded by a thick, dark belt of these self-same pines, while just beyond lay the meadow, within its fringe of hackmatack and bitter alder. On the other side of this natural dome of farming-land, the slope is not less easy and gentle to the black line of *Coniferæ*, which, like the rim of a shapely cup, beautifully irregular, its old-gold lining peeping out here and there, holds within its charmed circle a crescent of yellow sands, and a wide reach of inland pond, burnished with the brightest of sunlight into the semblance of liquid silver.

Let me take you to an old watering-place, a perennial spring in the woods, that was a very familiar spot to me in my younger days. Let the pasture-bars drop, one by one. Do you hear the sharp echo of their clanging notes come back from the rim of the woodland? I hear the vibrations of those dropping barriers of sun-dried pine, even at this distance of time and space; "sounds

from home" they are in truth. It was an ever-wonderful outlook from the farm hill-top, lofty, breezy, and in every sense invigorating; and not less delightful was the plunge down its easy slopes, out of the scorching glow of the midsummer sun, into the refreshing shadows of the sapling-pines. From this gateway in the old wall that hems in the pasture-lands, it is but a short distance over the blueberry or the checkerberry knolls and through the grassy streets frequented by the cows, that with many a twist and turn take one betwixt the clumps of white-flowering thorn that fill the air with delicate perfume, to the dwarf pines and hemlocks that make the skirmish-line of the deeper forest. Down a bit, along the edge of this jutting cape of woodland is an arched opening, and opposite, a few rods to the right, is a crease or sagging fold in the face of the pasture, where the grass shows a streak of lighter green, as if earth were more lavish of her fertility here than elsewhere. This streak of extravagant color is the silent betrayer of a water-vein, that gushes out among the rocks lower down the swale through the spring months, but that disappears with the coming of July's drying heats. It is not a favorite watering-place with the cattle. Its outlet is broad and marshy, and its stream is lost in a bed of oozy, black muck, from whence, in times gone by, have been taken many an ox-load of de-

cayed vegetable matter to the compost-heaps of the uplands. The cattle like better the running stream yonder in the depths of the woods. Once fairly within this Gothic archway of the June woods, how delightful the change into the soft-falling shadows! The woods are palpitating with music. Do you hear the xylophone-player rapping out his tune upon that hollow maple-stub, just beyond that dark-green curtain of black hemlocks? It is the morning solo of the *Hylatomus Pileatus*, the largest and handsomest of the New England Woodpecker family. How sharply fly the notes through the air! First a few notes, as if he were marking time, and then the long, stirring roll that wakes the drowsy woods into a confusion of echoes. Then a deep silence for a moment. The fellow, in his greenish black coat, may have discovered our intrusion. If he has, we shall not see him, for he is exceeding shy. I hardly dare breathe, much more move my feet, for fear a crackling twig may betray us. But we are still unseen, for there is a sound as of the tearing and stripping-off of bark and wood, and in a moment more there comes a measured tap, — one, two, three, in even succession, then more stripping of bark, and I know that we are as yet undiscovered. How stealthily we creep over the mossy floor under the hemlocks! Ah, there he is, clinging gracefully, but with the grip of an

athlete, to the tall dead maple, from the topmost limbs of which I have shot many a gray squirrel aforetime. His back is toward us, and I watch him chiselling with powerful thrust into this stout-ribbed tree, with stroke after stroke of his sharp, black bill. What a busy search he is making after borers and other vermin that hide within the barks of these decaying trees! How firmly he holds to the slippery, grayish wood, where it has been denuded of its covering! A moment more of silence and he sounds a few measured beats, and then follows a rattling drum-call. What swift strokes, made with a rapidity beyond the pretence of mental counting! He throws back his head and utters a single bird-call, and there is a sound of some swiftly moving body through the air, a galloping of wings, and his mate has joined him. She is the smaller of the two. They seem to hold a consultation, and then, creeping warily to the rear side of the maple-stub, off they go with a funny-sounding cackle. It is a queer, dry note, but one to be long remembered. The log-cock, or *pileatus*, is an all-the-year-round resident of the Maine woods, and, although I have seen him and his mate on the trees, along the huge, moss-covered logs that lie so thickly about in the "second-growths," the relics of the pioneers in these woods, and darting through the woodland shadows like a flying missile, in summer and in winter,

I have never discovered his nesting-place. He is the Prince of Woodpeckers, in all his barbaric strength and beauty. It is worth a long wait in the woods to see this one bird. But the hemlocks about us look as if they had been tattooed. A bit up from the base of each tree, on its southern side especially, are parallel rows of small perforations through the bark, about the size of a pea and hardly two inches apart. This is the work of the Downy Woodpecker, the smallest of the species. Each hole is a trace of their search after the larvæ and eggs deposited by the millions of summer insects that fill their part in animate nature. He does not exhibit the shyness of the *Hylatomus*, and I have many a time crept to within a few feet of the little fellow as he was busy at his breakfast. The Downy Woodpecker is a handsome fellow, indeed, in his coat with its broad, white stripe down its back seam, with its black sleeves splashed with round white spots, his white necktie, and with a dash of scarlet on the collar behind.

During the fall months you will see this Woodpecker at work in the orchards, boring one hole after another with his gimlet of a bill, making a circle around the limb or tree-trunk, until the bark looks as if a charge of buck-shot had been fired into it, and as though every shot had struck by rule. This fellow is a treasure to the orchardist.

He does not work about the trees in sap-time, but it is really when he does them the least harm. Those who have paid most attention to the habits of the downy woodpecker assert that, were it not for the *Picidæ*, the orchard trees would be overrun with vermin; and it has been noticed that the trees most visited by them are the most rugged in their growth, and, as well, the most prolific bearers. This bird plays its part to perfection in the economics of Nature, for it is a veritable scavenger among tree-vermin. I doubt not but the birds satisfy all claims for farm damages committed by them, by reason of the police duty they are constantly performing. Why growl at their taking a homely recompense to themselves. Hang up your shot-guns, boys; the birds of all kinds have a sufficiently hard time of it, even if you let them well alone. Let the woodpecker inspect the apple-trees as much as he will; your apple-bins will need an extra board to hold the hoard of the orchard.

In front of the farm-house was a row of butternut-trees; and above these, flanking the door-yard fence were three mulberry-trees, and within the door-yard area close by was a stately elm overtopping them all. One of the mulberry tops was quite dead, and for years I remember its upward pointing branches stripped of their bark, as straight and sharply tapering in their slender lengths, and as

rain and sleet-scoured in their polished whiteness, as a stack of lances. This was one of the drilling-grounds of the woodpecker tribe. From one end of the day to the other, some one member of this numerous family was in sight; and the acrobatic performances along the upright limbs and trunks of these trees were something marvellous to my boyish eyes. This fence ran down the slope of the yard to the highway, the barrier to which, on the field side, was an old tumble-down wall, and along its ragged top was laid a line of topping-poles, dead pines cut in the woods where the trees stood so thickly that these particular trees died from suffocation; these poles were laid along this rambling barrier of cobble-stones to tone up things a bit by way of completeness, and as well to keep the wayside cattle from jumping from the poor man's pasture, the country road, into the more tempting and richly endowed fields beyond. Here were a half a dozen apple-trees arow, as scraggy, homely, and full of character as apple-trees usually are, and that ran down its length to the boundary line of the adjoining farm. It was the constant habit of the woodpeckers to strike the tree farthest down the line in their flight up from the woods, as they began their morning tour of inspection around the farm, galloping from tree to tree, for their flight is more like a gallop than anything else.

From topmost limb to base of trunk goes the woodpecker in his busy searching-out of the floss-wound cocoons and hidden deposits of insect larvæ. I have watched by the whole hour to see them go round and round the stalwart trunk of one tree after another; tearing off a bit of bark here, a bit there, boring here a hole and there a hole, with a sure instinct that a sweet morsel would crown their labors a moment later. What a lively fellow in his coat of half-mourning, relieved by a spot or two of scarlet! Did you ever note the action of this winged gadder as he puts his ear up to the rough garb of a tree, as if he were locating his prey? That is precisely what he is doing. He is locating a nest of ants, or the tunnelled home of a borer, by sound. See him draw his little head back, until the tips of his tail-feathers are thrown against the rind of the tree below, where his feet grip into its fibre; and then, how swiftly he rains the telling blows into the bark, like those of a maul upon a chisel. The bark is soft, and you do not hear his rat-tat-tat, rat-tat, rat-tat-tat-tat-tat, so distinctly as you will when he gets to the dead mulberry; but the chips fly, and you know how earnestly he is engaged in the pursuit of his prey, to let you get so near him that you can see the roguish wink he gives you from time to time, as much as to say, — "I see you, little boy, but don't bother me. I've-struck-it, I've-struck-it, rich-rich-

rich. Don't-you-see, don't-you-see, rich-rich-rich-rich-rich-rich-rich?" and so he pounds and chisels his way into the decayed wood with his sharp bill, until his head is out of sight almost. All at once the pounding stops. There is a deep silence. The woodpecker's head is motionless, and pushed as far into the aperture he has made as he can get it, and with his long, barbed tongue he is pulling out a big white worm. How daintily he wipes his mouth upon a rarer than damask napkin, a bit of gray lichen, after his luncheon; and then he is off to the next tree in the row, where he repeats his first performance with equal grace and vigor. These little fellows work with surprising rapidity and an unflagging industry. There is a marvellous buoyancy in every movement, and a cute knowingness that lends a rare charm to their action, whether alight or awing. Their flight from one tree to another is a sort of rollicking gambolling in air; and there is a tinge of grim humor in the way they have of knocking for admittance at the door of the poor worm that is to be served upon their breakfast-table. If the worm could think audibly, no doubt he would call the woodpecker a Ku Klux of the most outrageous type, a most desperate and destructive character, a router and a murderer. Some people have no idea that there is such a thing as a just retribution, or that justice, sooner or later, requires a full recompense of misdoers;

nevertheless, wickedness rarely goes unpunished. If it is not punished by the open visitation of the penalty, there is an ever present sense, call it what you may, — conscience or what not, — of debasement and moral impoverishment, that saps manhood of its larger, better strength and courage. But the butternuts and the dead mulberry-tree were always the ones last visited; and what a rattling of swift notes at this musicale among the white polished lances of their bare limbs!

Oftentimes three or four of these dry-wood musicians are playing at "taps" at the same moment among these low-limbed trees, and with the chirping of the sparrows, the whistling of the oriole, and the vocal sparring of robin and bob-o'-link, and the humming of the bees in the brown hives adjacent to the garden clover-blossoms, their xylophone accompaniment is in wonderfully good taste and brilliantly executed. Unlike the red-head, the downy woodpecker does not invade the cornfield, or the fruits in the garden, but serves rather as an aide-de-camp to the farm-hands, who go around among the trees with mop-brushes and dilutions of soap, lime-water, and other home-made vermin-exterminators. Our favorite is not gifted with song, but he is a musician of no mean merit; and his sharp, staccato notes are ever welcome and pregnant with meaning.

His company is certainly worth his maintenance about the farm.

But let us return from our chase after the downy woodpecker, to the winding paths that the cattle make in the woods, brown with the leaves of last autumn and thickly carpeted with petioles, — "chives" the country-folks call them, — from the hemlocks overhead. It is a lazy pace the cows take over and through these sylvan highways, but how finely the accumulations of twigs and drifting leaves have been ground under the tread of their clean hoofs! On either side of these pathways are thickly matted beds of partridge-berry, with their scarlet fruit, and on the knolls are clusters of the bunch-berry, of a shade lighter scarlet with ochreous tint, and all about are the slender, spindling stems of the ground-nut, with tiny white petals thrown wide-open, inviting us to dig down through the soft leaf-mould to its globular-shaped root, that, when eaten, leaves in the mouth a sweet, aromatic taste. Here are beautiful, gracefully nodding anemones by scores, delicately veined lady's-slippers, and an occasional lady's-smock, to lend their colors to the figured carpetings. How indolently our feet carry us over these narrow cattle-trails! How much there is to see! In one of the hollows the ground is still moist, and here we discover the fresh track of the cows as they have come from their break-

fast in the pasture. The marks of their feet are perfectly outlined in the fine black loam. But leaving the shadows of the hemlocks, we are in the deeps of the birches. Here are tender sapling-birches, gray birches, with their white barks that look as if Nature never had a washing-day, dirty and unkempt, with hosts of dead twigs clinging to their trunks, and spotted with countless specks and black pimples, bending and reeling even now under the aching backs that the snows of last winter gave them. Here are yellow birches and the canoe-birch, and occasionally a fine specimen of the white birch with all its interlacing of delicate drooping limb; and beyond a huge beech-tree, that one man cannot half encircle with his arms, is the single wild apple-bearer of these woods, an aristocrat among its forest brethren, with its clean, tall body and long, slender arms reaching skyward. If you should ask the owner of the farm what sort of an apple it bore, he would tell you, "natural fruit," at once; but press him a little farther, he would say, "They're 'long-stems,' hard as a rock of emerald in the fall, but yellow and juicy as one would wish in June." So they are, for I have carried many a one to the summer-school in my tin pail. Do you note again its slender body, and long, shapely limbs, each one as neat and trim as that of an elm? I well remember the stems to these apples,

for they were not less than three inches in length at their best: and their flavor was what one might expect, tempered with the sunlight and shadow of the woods. These birches are the best of game-cover for miles around, with their thick carpetings of leaves and intricate interweavings of foliage and moist runs that indicate water-veins just below their surface. It is in these depressions in the floors of the woods that one finds the most delicate and beautiful of the moss family, hiding here and there the rough granite bowlders beneath their drapery of softest green and black velvet plush, that the looms of men will never know.

One sees hosts of birds in this month of June. Every tree has its pair of songsters, for this is the nest-building month of the year. The birds are in their best voice, and their plumage is most brilliant. The birds in the woods are legion. I was informed not long since, upon good authority, that in a single county in a neighboring State over ten thousand birds were butchered in a single season for their skins: a butchery that was carried on to satisfy not only a despicable greed, but to gratify a vanity that for thoughtlessness and downright cruelty has no equal. It is something for which people should answer to the Almighty, if they are to account for any human weakness. How any woman can bedeck herself

in the garb of such God-given blessings as the singing-birds are, and at the expense of such indiscriminate slaughter of the most divinely voiced and beautiful things in animate Nature, is beyond any conception of my own. Fashion is no excuse. It is simple brutality. I cannot qualify my detestation of a characteristic so blunted in its love for the beautiful and in tender feeling as well. How a woman, who would be quick to exhibit compassion in other things, who loves the fragrant flowers, and who is not insensible to the vocal charms of these field and woodland musicians, can wear a butchered brown or red thrush, or any one of Nature's sweet singers, for that matter, in her hat or bonnet, without being conscience-stricken, is more than I can imagine. I wonder that women of instinctive and tender refinement can do this thing; they do it, nevertheless, and with an air of utter unconsciousness of wrong. To bow without remonstrance to such a fashion would seem to make such a head-gear a badge of cowardice; but the firm stand taken by some women in this matter is to be admired, and lovers of these feathered songsters are grateful to know that woman's effort to induce her sex to discard the wearing of bird-ornaments has been in part successful. Killing birds and robbing bird's-nests when I was a boy were among the meanest and most contemptible things a boy could do, and, by

the unwritten law of the farm, it was a serious misdemeanor to do either, and for which the culprit was promptly treated to a taste of birch or apple-tree limb. I wish it were upon the statute-books of every State that not only the killing of birds, but the having in possession by milliners, and the wearing of their stuffed skins in whole, or in part, should be a misdemeanor punishable by fine. Such a law, in part, exists in many States, but it is a dead letter. There are equities in Nature as in more abstract things, and the rights of the song-birds to protection at the hands of both farmer and citizen are based upon natural laws and sound moral principles. What thing so impoverishes the human soul, until it dies of starvation, as Vanity!

II.

If you will notice this huge beech, you will see much that is true of almost all trees. It is a huge trunk and hardly more than a man's height from the ground; its lower branches reach out into the tops of this medley of birch-tree and sapling-maple that surround it, like retainers around their feudal baron of the woods. These branches reach out on all sides, forty, fifty feet, and even more, with an upward curve along their outer lengths that is very graceful and attractive.

There is one feature about the beech that is common to its kind ; its foliage, draped along less than a score of sprawling limbs, is an open network of living green, letting into its depths floods of sunlight. A bird's nest in a beech is a rarity, unless it may be that of a crow, which is not an uncommon incident in wood-lore ; but one may find a gray squirrel's nest in its top, for this fellow lives out-of-doors in summer. Its buds, that a month ago were so brown and glossy, and shaped like elongated spear-heads in miniature, are now burst out into leaves of the lightest shade of green, that are almost transparent, and as soft as down, and so tender and juicy that the cattle find them sweet browsing. Later in the season, these downy leaflets will have expanded into their perfect growth, when the sun has dyed them a deeper, darker hue, and stiffened their grain or fibre, and added a brilliant gloss, as if each one had been coated with shellac. With the first frosts, they will fade out into amber, and drift down with every wind a shower of rustling leaves. One gets an idea of the quantity of leaves that cover these shapely limbs, as he scuffs through their depths in the hollows where the winds have blown them.

The most attractive feature about the beech-tree is its massive stalwartness, as if Nature were calling you to look at one of her exhibits where

strength and solidity were the predominating qualities, without any lessening of graceful proportion or airiness in the general effect. The beech is a native of rugged soils where the outcropping ledges of granite and deep-set bowlders give the grip of its outreaching roots something of stanchness as they seek sustenance from the friable earth of the woodlands. If you examine it critically, you will notice with what stout ribs its fluted base is braced against mother Earth's bosom. Dig out its roots and measure them; add up their lengths and discover that there is another tree underground, that you have not seen, and that the aggregate linear proportions of this soil-hidden tree are not less than those of the tree that sways in the wind and sun over your head. Some trees, notably the elm and *Gileadensis*, extend their lateral roots to points rods away from the parent-tree, crossing even the solidly packed tread of the century-old highways, piercing cellar-walls, and dislodging oftentimes their largest stones and seriously impairing their foundations.

This underground structure of the tree plays a double part. Its roots are the conduits or waterways through which the tree-foliage draws its water, and by which it satisfies its thirst. Here, too, are the deep-laid foundations that brace the tree firmly against the heavy wind-storms that

sweep down from the hills on sweltering hot summer afternoons. Let the storm howl and buffet as it will, there is not a tremor among the close-knit fibres that make this stout body of the beech, though the limbs are twisted and torn from it, and carried far through the woods. Just under the gray rinds of limb and trunk and the brown rind of the roots are the delicate cells that hold the living matter of the tree. What tensive strength of fibre is here in this most non-elastic of forest-trees! but what is true of the beech, in its essentials, is true of all trees. According to Dr. Goodale, in our Northern trees, the protected buds represent the possible growth during one spring and summer. The rapid expansion of the buds, during the late weeks of spring, is possible only through the abundant supply of constructive material laid up during the previous summer. When the bud-expansion has ceased, there is little further growth throughout the plant, except under the bark, where an additional thickening takes place. So the growth goes on from year to year, until the saplings have grown into monarchs of the woods.

The roots of deciduous trees reach out into the soil laterally much farther than do those of the cone-bearing trees. An observer will have noticed that trees bear an expression characteristic of their kind, of shape, the fashion of their leaf,

the massing of their foliage; and there is even a wider dissimilarity in leaf and bark, the rapidity and luxuriance of the tree-growth depending upon conditions of soil and exposure. A moist, strong soil and southern exposure afford the most favorable conditions.

Invert this huge old beech, with its wrinkled hide and sprawling limbs, upturn its feet, that set on the ground like ship's knees, into the air, and you will discover another tree, with more delicate organisms still. Nature does her rarest work in seclusion.

This narrow cape of low-topped birches and slender maples, running from the pasture opening down into this sea of *Coniferæ*, is a favorite resting-place of the woodland songsters. As we go down this primitive road in summer, dipping and rising, now into the hollows and now up over the mossy knolls, much after the flight of a woodpecker, in its undulatory trend, we see but few of these out-door dwellings of the birds, but in fall or winter, when the winds have curried the bushes of their faded yellow coats, if one chances to come this way, he may discover hosts of curiously woven nest-dwellings deserted by their occupants, and empty but for the stray leaf or falling snow that has lodged in them. Each nest is a poem of prophecy. What a picture the snow-filled nest in winter, and what a dream-land lies within its whitened rim! It is a heartless invader, this

child of the North, that drives our winged friends from their woodland homes, and wraps the woods in silence. One rarely finds the smaller wood-birds building their homes in the larger growths of timber, but rather among the alders and birches so plentifully sprinkled through their wet places and streaks of shallow soil where the lesser saplings find their home.

On this bright June morning the birds are lively enough — and noisy enough, for that matter, if one can call a bird-note akin to noise. They are fairly boisterous in their appreciation of these opening days of summer. Here are scarlet tanagers, with their velvet-black wings, flashing like bits of flame between the bars of sunlight that drop here and there through the tree-tops, and the whole family of warblers, as well, flycatchers, titmice, nut-hatches, and the slate-colored snow-bird, keep jolly company with the glum cedar-bird, in his suit of Quaker drab and tiny markings of bright scarlet and Naples yellow. We do not seem to be regarded as intruders at all. All are "at home" to us, and fly along beside the cow-path as if by their chatter to show us some extra attention, or, more likely, because they wished to discover our errand, whether it tended toward the thresholds of their own homes or away. It must have been the latter, I think, for June is the month of eggs and fledglings. Only the blue-jays seem to avoid our

company, as usual, but it does not matter; one can always do without bad company and their bad manners. I never forget the brilliant coat of the tanager or the comical-looking fellow, with his tail cocked up in the air, well tipped toward his head, dropping, one by one, dolorous notes from his wren-throat.

What enlivenment and warmth of glowing color this winged population lends to this land of shadows, but nowhere in their leafy depths can one escape the unmusical drawl of that "Flying Dutchman" among birds, the crow. His hoarse voice is incessant in its discordant hallooing from his quarry in the hemlock-tops, and the squawking of the young crows gets to be monotonous by mid-day, when, tired with their own clamor, they subside into a grateful quiet. This fellow is omnipresent in June, when the corn is thrusting its green spike up out of the brown loam of the recently planted corn-patch. If he does not twig at your button-hole, as some men do, he twigs at your corn-patch with a vengeance. He is a pestiferous concomitant of bird-life, like the hawk and his treacherous tribe.

What swarms of midgets hover here and there in the path, a nebulous mass of motion! How they dance up and down, always in one place and at about the same height from the ground! The cattle have been this way within a brief space of time, for here are marks of their browsings by the

side of the path. The silken warps so industriously spun by the spiders, from side to side, have been torn down, and the ruins blow away in the light wind like strands of gossamer. What iconoclasts the cattle are among these temples of the smaller wood-dwellers. But here is a broad opening in the tops of the trees, and a big round shaft of sunlight drops down into the tangle of luxuriant polypody, their tall, flaunting pennons still wet with morning dew. How rankly they grow here, completely hiding the path, and reaching to the hips as we go through them. How blue the sky as we look up from this flood of green through the open tree-tops, and how white the clouds that sail so swiftly over our narrow outlook, against the pearly-hued masses of which is limned a circling flight of swallows that have wandered hither from the barns beyond the farm-ridge.

Just below that knoll, crowned with the pink blossoms of the wild oxalis, with its whorls of light, yellowish green leaves, the wood-sorrel of boyhood, is the fairest shrine in these wide woods. Here is a deep basin with steeply descending, fern-shadowed sides, a

> "poetic nook
> Just hid with trees and sparkling with a brook."

Ah, here are the fragrant-breathed cattle, knee-deep in water! Here is the old spring of cold, sweet water that supplied the pioneers of the early

settlement days, and all kinds of trees come to drink of its limpid depths, and what a jolly family they seem, whistling, singing, and soughing in response to every wind that blows up the pond or down over the hills. Here are rough-barked, gnarly, wide-armed beeches, broad-leaved lindens, stalwart canoe-birches, white and smooth-barked, their delicate limbs like ancient Flemish work, full of soft lines and dainty traceries and ruddy with the color of a rich Venetian red; yellow birches, hung from topmost twig to base and sprawling root with their lavish adornment of amber spangles and streamers shimmering like old silver on sunny days against the grayer background of forest shadows, and tremulous with every breath of wind; scrawny hornbeams, the iron-wood of the chopper, a stray white or river maple, a feathery-boughed hemlock, its low, drooping branches bent to the ground, with dwarf fir-trees and spindling pines in abundance, their tops mingled in pleasing confusion above the run of spring-water, where grow the richest and most luxuriant of woodland mosses and ferns, light green, terre-verte, with ever varying tone from warm to cool, and hosts of creeping vines for carpeting. From the top of this bank, deeply fringed with the drooping banners of the thick-growing ferns that bend down with graceful caress where the spring sings, —

Bubble, bubble, bubble-up, bubble, —

the year round, through its rare filter of the whitest of white sand, — hiding within their shadows a bit of bark from the canoe-birch, not long since used as a drinking-cup, and as idly tossed away after quaffing this woodland nectar, and that gleams in the summer sun like an ingot of old gold, — from this home of the Naiads we can see the silver track of the sun spanning the blue waters of the pond. Well might the poet say of this placid stream, as he did of another not more beautiful, —

> " So blue yon winding river flows,
> It seems an outlet from the sky,
> Where, waiting till the west wind blows,
> The freighted clouds at anchor lie," —

and there is not less of pictured beauty here. It is all a fair midsummer's dream, with pink-stained columbines, and trilliums and humble housatonia, bell-worts and ginsengs, masses of climbing sweet-briar, tangles of meadow-rue and saxifrage, and tapestried mosses set with spikes of horse-tail ; the beautiful white orchis and lavender as well, and marsh-mallow, with overarching limbs of forest-trees for scenery, with birds and frolicsome squirrels and the cattle for actors. What a rare theatre this !

Further down the run, the pine-trees are larger, and of older growth, indicating by their long, shapely, limbless bodies the once crowded family

of forest children, now depleted by the woodsman, and, as well, the ravages of decay.

Oftentimes these young growths of timber crowd so thickly together that individual trees become dwarfed; and, overshadowed by the more luxuriant foliage of their companions, they drop one by one along the forest floors, food for a horde of fungi, and whose forms of transition are so varied and so beautiful. It is among these stalwart growths of the *Coniferæ* that one finds many curiously beautiful things in Nature. Up and down their rugged rinds I discover rich specimens of the lichen, and always of the rarest tints and softest, velvety fabric ever woven in the looms of the woodland shadows. Lichens possess a great charm for me, with their variations of form, their depth and richness of color. But I find, too, queer specimens of fungoid growth as well, the genus *polyporus* being the most singularly beautiful and attractive, growing often to huge proportions, reaching out visor-like from the rind of some ancient oak or beech, or as likely a yellow birch. As I have discovered them in my woodland travels, I seemed to feel that a mischievous dryad was scanning my approach from within its crescent shadow, and I have stepped the lighter for the thought of my woodland sprite, as if I might come upon him unawares; but all to no purpose, for he has eluded me so far, as I expect he always will.

These fungoid growths are the children of dampness and shadow, feeding upon the trees with smoothest bark, like the river maple, birch, or beech, and drinking their fill from every rain-shower and storm. The deeper the shadow, the more immense their proportions, and the richer and more varied the coloring. Sometimes their tops are of a delicate cream shade, with rippling lines of salmon tint near the outer rim, the lines growing darker and darker as they near the rind of the tree, until the tones are merged into a rich, warm brown, while, underneath, the rarest of écru frescoing completes the decoration of this hooded portal. Sometimes the roofs to these bits of woodland architecture are covered with a glaze of such rare color and brilliancy as would drive a Minton or a Wedgewood to the end of his wits, to rival its dainty suggestions of sunlit sky and dun-hued cloud, while its arched ceiling is richly painted in old-gold and umber. They take on odd shapes, as well of regular as irregular contour, the most beautiful of which are those with scalloped edges, like the shells one discovers among the rocks and sands of the sea-shore. As fairy-like as they seem, they are so firmly fastened to the bark of the tree that they are dislodged only by sturdy blows with club or axe, and so closely knitted their grain as to withstand the blade of the stoutest knife.

Where the trees stand thickest, there is most

rapid decay. In a season or two after the death of the trees, decay sets in, rapidly devouring the *alburnum*, or sap-wood, of the tree. The great white borers puncture the bark, and soon make their way well into the body of the tree, working from the roots upward, excavating multitudinous tubular canals or highways which lie parallel to each other, making of the once solid tree-trunk the most beautiful and curiously wrought bits of architecture that one may find in the realm of Nature. Once begun, the work of the borer goes on incessantly, as you may discover for yourself if you will but put your ear to the gray bark of the dead pine by day or night. I have often wondered what sort of an implement this woodland tunnel-builder used in his operations; for to my ear it sounds very much like the wheezy twist of the old pod-auger of my boyhood days, when the fence-posts were being bored and mortised for the newly split rails of pine, or whenever a new yoke of maple or elm, or yellow birch like enough, was needed for the refractory steers, of which there were always one or more pairs about the barn.

I have on many a bright June morning perched myself upon the apex of the tall wood-pile which reached almost to the mid-top of the wide-limbed sugar-sweeting tree behind the wood-shed, the white and pink blossoms of the old apple-tree

drifting lightly, silently down about my shoulders with every breeze, and from thence watched my father plying the rude tools that comprised the limited carpentry equipment of those days. Here was the out-door workshop for the making of sleds, ladders, and such other handiwork, however rude and homely it may have been, as belonged to the husbandry of the farm, and of all the quaint reminiscences of which none has lingered with such distinctness as the asthmatic squeak of the old rusty auger, as it made its journey downward into pillar or post with every half-twist of its stubby, oaken handle; a fit companion to the antiquated draw-shave, which had been so many times "upset" at the village smithy, and which was wont to share the honors with a plane of like remote ancestry, a narrow-bladed adze, a chisel or two, with maul of frizzled elm, and all of which were carefully housed, and kept beyond the reach of the youngsters. The old wooden "draw-horse," with its flaring legs with long foot-pedal between, and spring-pole atop of all, securely fastened to its unwieldy head with a castaway bit of clothes-line, and that has held many a birch hoop and oaken wheel-spoke between its upper and nether jaws in its time, may have suffered much perturbation of spirit at the distinguished and delicate consideration shown the lesser tools while itself was left to shiver and

shake in the winter winds, or hide its head as best it could under the drifting midwinter snows, neglected and forgotten quite. There was for years an old pine log that haunted the shadow of this apple-tree, a great gnarled stick that was not worth the labor of working it into firewood, and to which the old "draw-horse" was firmly spiked at one end, which was to me the paradise of the Borer family. After the frost had departed and the warm weather had touched up the fields and budding trees with anticipations of springing grasses and singing birds, the wheezy grind of these wood-workers has begun, and many a curious conjecture occupied my mind, in those days, as to the impelling motive that actuated these great white worms to such constant, unflagging industry. Many a time, while sauntering through the thick-leaved woods, I have come across the fallen trunk of some huge pine or spruce, overturned by some summer tempest or winter storm of damp, clogging snow, and have bent my listening ear to it, to be rewarded a moment later with the faint music of this master-workman among subterranean engineers; and now, when in the woods with rod or gun, or perhaps with witless purpose, hosts of far-away recollections will come with every bar of this insect wood-worker's strident song. If I tap my appreciation upon the bark, my wood-working friend lapses into silence, to

begin his boring anew a moment later with renewed vigor. I detach some of the bark from this log in my search for the little fellow who is making all this music for me, but have only found, however, one of those beautiful mysteries which Nature hides away from those who are indifferent to much of her charm. On the inner side of this bit of bark is a miniature tree, of snowy white, with well developed trunk, with spreading branches, and all the delicate film and interlacing of twig and leaf, and all soft as down as if worked with fairy fingers. It is a fungus known technically as a group of *Mycelia*, belonging to a low order of leafless, flowerless plants, numbering a half a hundred thousand species. They remind one very forcibly of the coarser frost-work on the window-pane of a cold morning, and are not the less beautiful or wonderful in their foliage-like distribution of line and tracing which make up the picture before me, which is of the kind known as the *Polyporus radula*, the most active of all the fungi in taking from the cell-structure of the different varieties of wood to which it attaches itself all the elements which they have assimilated or taken into their woody structure during their growth. The stripping-off of more bark will disclose further beauties in this land of fungi. Here is a bit of *Polyporei* in *resupinate* form, with its cream-like coloring and irregular contour, a

mass of soft fungous growth attached to the inner surface of the bark, much resembling a bit of dough thinly rolled out, but of rich, velvety texture, with orange-tinged edge, with just a suggestion of a fresh smell about it, and wonderfully cool to touch. Hawthorne's tales of Wonderland, dear as they are to the childish heart, do not approach in their quaintest, weirdest guise to the suggestion of magic that lies within the portals of the woods.

A tramp through the woods must be one of indolent movement to be most pleasurable. There is so much to see, and so many things end up with an interrogation point, that the hours go, one hardly knows where, except that they are gone, and in their place have come hosts of pleasant sensations, and a rare fund of entertainment for days to come. Hours that leave their trace in oft-recurring thought are not flown, but are the rather fastened into one's present living, and move along from one day into another. Some get to be stragglers, and drop out; but such as these, spent about the watering-places in the woods, are always in the vanguard of pleasing reminiscence.

The cattle are here yet. How quietly they stand in the shallows of these living, ever running waters! How lazily they swish their tails in mild remonstrance to the persistent attentions of the mosquitoes, whose number is legion! The black

flies sing their droning music in restless swarms, that get into one's face occasionally, which is disagreeable enough; but the shrill note of the mosquito is the most exasperating. These insects are the vampires of the June woods. In these mosquito days the woodsman regards a shower of rain a blessing devoutly to be wished, for nothing diminishes the numbers of these lowland pests like the watery flail of a smart shower, unless it be a sharp autumn frost. Dodge our assaults as they will, dance up and down in the smoke of our smothered smudge-fire, they cannot escape the swift-falling, raking rain-drops, though their instinct teaches them to seek shelter under bits of bark, and within the interstices of the rough rinds of the trees, and under the leaves. I have turned a piece of hemlock-bark bottom side up, just after a rain, and there is a perfect swarm or colony of mosquitoes housed beneath its nether side, as dry as if the broadest roof in town were over them; but the rain-drops come too suddenly for them to get to cover in season, oftentimes. The mosquito does not seem to have the barometer attachment that is common to some insects, — at least, he does not get in out of the rain, as some of them do. Thrice blessed is the angler in these days to whom the presence of the mosquito brings no annoyance.

The cattle are imperturbable. A drowsy flap-

ping of ears, a half-shake of the head is the only sign of animation, unless they are chewing the sweet cud of content, as they stand with hoofs deep in the floods of Nature's romance, for it is upon these slender threads of running waters that Nature strings her woodland emeralds, and within the shadows of their fountain-heads that she builds her Delphic oracles. Do you catch the song of summer in the faint rustling of the leaves of the white birch? The cows hear the prophecy, and, with eyes half-shut, are lost in pastoral dreams.

The sun is hidden in the cumuli that go sailing through the sky in the late forenoon. How gray the woodland has grown in this opalescent cloud-shadow! The green leaves have a tinge of pearl-dust, so soft is the peculiar light reflected from the huge cloud that obscures the bright sun. The noon-hour has almost struck by the farm-house clock, and a sudden silence has fallen with this shadow. The red squirrel has put up his whistle, and, farmer-like, is taking his noonday nap. The crows are quiet for once; the tanagers, the warblers and wood-sparrows, the titmice and nut-hatches, and Downy, our orchard musician, our bone-player among the bird-minstrels, have disappeared, and we are alone.

It is not all silence; for the ripple of this stream beats upon the air with a singularly metallic

rhythm, flowing along its sandy track toward the barrier left by the beaver family, when they moved out of town years ago, creeping through its broken dyke, to drop at last, with a clear, tinkling note, into the emerald flood of Pleasant Pond. It is here, where these cold waters drop down, that the iridescent perch and the silver-bellied chub come at sunup and sundown to drink, and to snap at the flies that make these inland ponds their habitats. It is here that one finds the red-spot of the pond, if anywhere; but they are rarely tempted to rise, to worm or fly, at the hand of the angler. It is only the good-for-nothing fellow, who was "born tired," who can tempt these finny Solomons from their staid indifference. The wind must be rarely right, from the southward, of course, and the sun must throw a rarely gray beam across the water, and the angler must be a rarely good fisher. A rare good trout-fisher is seldom good for anything else. He is the shirk of the hay-field and the loafer among the corn-rows. He is the shiftless fellow of the neighborhood, and witless in all else but snaring and trapping and fishing. He will take a twig of witch-hazel and find you an underground water-vein with it, or, most like, tell you when the rain is coming; but in all else he is a child. His story-books are the fields and woodland nooks; his lamp is the sky, and his dreams are mingled with

the sound of ripraps in the meadow-brooks, with the reverberant long-roll of the partridge-drummer, and the piping of the upland plover. He is a common enough looking individual about the farm, but take him among the alders and meadow-rue, under the gray shadows of the elms, in mid-afternoon or on misty days, and he is, to the ordinary observer, as much a part of the meadow-landscape as its old barns and stumps, so silent and impersonal is he. I envy him his skill, but not the other qualities that enter into his make-up as a man, though his heart is ever as "big as that of an ox;" but he does not seem to get so much out of life as he might if he were a bit more selfish and farm-thrifty. It does not count, though, how many palaces a man may own, he cannot live in but one; a man lives but one life, and there may be something in the fact that he lives it to suit himself, — a selfish thought, some may say, — but he who lives to suit others may find himself, like Æsop's miller, the butt of his neighbor's jokes. But our fisherman is happy-go-lucky by nature; otherwise, how could he be on such good terms with the trout? He drinks from the brook where they swim, and I wonder if they whisper anything in his ear that he would not tell other people. If you ask him where the best fishing-ground may be found, he is silent. He knows, but his information is not for sale. His shrine is safe,

so far as his speech is concerned. If he asks you to go with him, he will show you where he succeeds best, but not by word of mouth. He will teach you something of the art; but, fish as you may, you get no rise, when hardly does his hook nip the stream and a lusty trout is dangling before your astonished eyes. Do you see how silent is the drill of this troutster? How deliberate, how slow, and with what method he makes his sport a livelihood! Let him have his secret; other people have theirs. Most men can catch trout where they abound, but to catch them where there seem to be none is the more difficult thing to do. Our fisherman of the woodland does this; but how, or by what necromancy of the rod, I could never discover.

This old watering-place, away from the haunts of men, is one of the secret places of Nature. How many such does she hold in her tree-girt, mossy cradles, with their sinuous water-lines, fern-embroidered, and rich in lowland blossoms! There is no other music like that of this woodland fountain; there is no other odor like that of these stalwart pines; no cup that Hebe bore to the gods that held such amber-hued distillations from the inner recesses of mother Earth's bosom. What cooling sensations came in hot midsummer, as this vintage of the woodland spring trickled down the throat, or what rarer lotion for the sun-

burned face than the drippings from this alembic of golden sand! It is alike the solace of human and brute wayfarer. It is the milk upon which Nature suckles her healthiest and stoutest children.

A SNUG CORNER.

A SNUG CORNER.

Oh, wondrous spell of sloping field, of tree and stream,
Of winding ways that laughing waters take to reach
The stilly pools aglow with amber tints of beech
And scarlet flame of maples, with arrowy gleam
Of gold, shot thro' the mesh of twig and leaf where dream
And drowse among the breathless pines, with hushed speech,
The topaz-gilded hours, a painter's palette each,
Myriad color-strewn by artist hands supreme.
Soundless the woodland's shadowy aisles; the wavering fall
Of slow-dropping things that to their burial creep,
The startled partridge's whirring flight, the jay's shrill call,
Above the cornfield's wind-blown stalks, are but the sweep
Of Nature's tuneful touch, the preludes that forestall
The grander symphonies that lull her world to sleep.

NATURE is a rare landscape-painter. What rare technique and wonderful effect of chiaroscuro are hers! No wonder, for it is a royal atelier, with its arched ceiling of blue and its ample north light, with wooded hills and mountains and slumbering valleys, with lakes and streams for garniture within which she sets up her easel. What broad brush-marks are those of the Sun, the Wind, and the Rain! but with what bold, skilful touch are her luminous colors laid in, and not the less tender or sympathetic! What a

color-mixer is the Sun! what vehicle like the Rain! what dryer is superior to the Wind!

Back and forth across the gray canvas of April, Nature has drawn her palette-knife or crisp brush, with deft and subtile hand, and lo! how swiftly the picture grows upon the vision! The high places are crowned with garments of living green, the gaunt-limbed, unkempt orchards are hooded in clustering whiteness, and, as the days increase, the pastures are pink with kalmias. Each billowy field is bound about with snood of crimson sumac and tangle of medley-colored vine, with perfumed hedge where bees glide in and out, to make the quaint but beautiful legend of the old Grecian painter a living truth.

Along the hill-slopes are splashes of gay clover-tints; and, as the picture grows, there come grayish green domes of hay-stacks with amber levels of swaying grain between the hedges that bound the upland mowing-fields, or cropping out along the pine levels of the plainlands that lie just a bit above the lush intervales, in a brilliant contrast of color. On the rim of the woods are the deepening shadows of mid-afternoon thunder-gusts with threats of wet and hail; and then a mistiness of falling rain when Sirius, with his brush wet with drizzling fogs inland-driven from the sea, sets his blurred signature to the fairest sketch of Summer. But another day and a swift flame is kindled on

the sloping woodland roofs, and from the pinnacles of their sanctuaries fly hosts of pennons in scarlet and yellow that fade with every added nightfall. Whence comes this dreamy haze, this suggestion of celestial blue, as if some master-hand had sought to hide, with just a perceptible scumbling of ultramarine ash, the garish hues of a full year of brilliant dyes? How swiftly has our mighty painter wrought this Masterpiece of Indian Summer! But Nature has dug the very bottom of her paint-pots out. She has squeezed her tubes of rarest color dry, and now piles her palette deep with flake-white; meanwhile, who is this who with cheery whistle and jaunty air takes one by one these treasures of the fleeting autumn to himself, with but scant courtesy, to set up in their stead a grayer, thinner canvas still?

> "Folk say, a wizard to a Northern king
> At Christmas-tide such wondrous things did show
> That through one window men beheld the spring,
> And through another saw the summer glow,
> And through the third the fruited vines arow;
> While, still unheard, upon its wonted way
> Piped the shrill wind of that December day."

This fellow is a wizard, but the windows that look out upon the spring-time and the warm, drowsy days of summer are closed, and the draperies are close-drawn; the days are full of gray shadows and ominous silences. Some call our visitor

wizard of the North. He is a painter, too, but his studies are mostly in monochrome. Sometimes he etches beautiful things upon the house window-panes, but the sun plays critic on such occasions, and, critic-like, thinks himself to have found here and there a defect, until the etcher, poor in spirit, drops his needle in disgust. These critics do not make such sad havoc with a fellow's work, after all, for Nature is not less the master-etcher when she covers these self-same window-panes with rarer and more wonderful traceries still, or when, with the biting north winds, she sharply outlines the bare tree-tops against the royal background of her ruddy sunsets. She has no fixative, only the rare quality of reproduction, for she uses the same old canvas, washed clean by equinoctial storms.

How cleanly have the woods and hedges by the walls and fences been raked by the hustling winds! what gray perspectives and sombre foregrounds await these studies in pure white that are to come in the silence of the night! Across the top of the broad canvas drive the leaden masses of snow-laden cloud, the huge brushes of the wintry limner of the woods and brown fields, for the days are done when

> Between the bared and waiting branches of the wood
> The mellow autumn haze, with subtile mood,

Weaves silently its filmy, golden web,
And, tireless as the ocean's flow and ebb,
Urges its noiseless shuttle o'er the hills and streams
To fill the closing idyl of the year with dreams.

This artist owns no niggling hand; his touch is sure and trenchant. His windy wrist is tireless, and down the sky, across the earth, it sweeps, to leave its trail of pictured whiteness wrought in dainty traceries and thick-woven webs of snow. How loud the praises of the Sun, with every wandering flake or frosty pellicle a jewel of prismatic beauty.

Nature is Poet, Painter, Philosopher all in one, and Orator even, if one is to take the word of the Wind for the fact. I have listened to the speech of the Wind when it moved its audience as a man might never do. As for philosophy, had there never been any philosophy in Nature there would never have been any in the books. It is needless to repeat what critics would call a platitude, that Nature offers a scope for study that is boundless; but there are some things that have to be told to men over and over again. Skulls are thicker in some instances than others, and it is only by a dint of pounding that their possessors can be made to see more than one thing at a time. I am here reminded of those people who see in the lush grasses of June and its royal coloring only the tint of a certain circulating me-

dium, at one time known to political economists as "rag money;" a needful thing in itself, and yet only a minor means to the real happiness of men. Nature's field is the superficies of the whole earth, and its contents as well. It is not too much to say that her better secrets are as yet unapplied, are mysteries still. Men may glory in their discoveries of metals, of steam and of electricity; but, metaphorically speaking, the key is still at the bottom of the well. It is only with infinite patience that the tangled skeins are undone. The chemist who has given years of thoughtful experiment to the unravelling of a single one of Nature's countless enigmas, and who may find himself baffled at the very door of discovery, will tell you that. Nature's every phase is a lesson, a faith-bearer to men. One might well take this truth to heart, this perfect enunciation of the Eternal Activity.

Were it not for Nature, I doubt if Faith could find seed-ground or seed-time; without these the harvest-time would be long deferred. Nature is constantly telling men to *do;* so a faith that is constantly dieted upon an introspective menu, and not fed upon the outward activities of a real human living, has no sustaining quality. A miller might as well hoist his water-gates, and, with the rushing tide that leaps headlong against his wheel, set his grindstones awhir beneath their empty

hoppers, and then watch the endless belt of meal-cups go up and down, holding his hands under their wooden spout to catch the golden grist that never comes, with as much reason as to believe that faith will pry a rock or pull a stump from out the ground without a combination of muscle and crowbar or a stump-machine and a yoke of oxen.

A painter believes in his ideal; but no one knows how lofty or how beautiful that is, until his brush has spoken. One may dream of the woods and the soft-falling shadows that linger about the feet of the eternal hills whose vestiture they make, or of the "eternal sunshine" that lights up their countenances by day; but until he has stood upon their summits, and gazed out upon the sea of cloud below, there is no substance to the dream. A religious faith has no nourishment from a soil that lies fallow the year through. To believe is one thing; to feel and know is quite another, and more. Knowledge comes from doing. We love the out-door life, because it is above the petty meannesses that beset pent-up humankind. A wild apple-tree may bear puckery fruit, but it has the virtue of being a vigorous and natural product. The trained fruit-bearers of the orchard make ample compensation for the poverty of their unreclaimed brethren.

I have often wondered if that thing which is

called the "milk of human kindness" were not a myth, only that Nature dispenses so much "milk" of her own. How different she is from the people who live upon her! It has seemed to me, for all that homely quality is so much talked about and admired by those who think themselves to have it in so large a degree, most men prefer to milk their neighbor's herds, while their own are well beyond their neighbor's reach or are safely locked within their own barns. People don't care to have their own udders stripped, if they can avoid it, and save their own reputation. Some people, I find, are successful in doing both. I find a great crop of good, profitable faith growing wild in the pastures sometimes, as sweet-smelling as the wild flower or modest arbutus that grows beside it; but that is no phenomenon, as wild things, that is, Nature, are akin to the better culture; but I find another kind of faith growing in the flowerless gardens of some other people, where "good works" has gone to seed long ago, and only the blackened stalks remain, silent and yet full of speech, to point the moral. All good action implies a lively trust of some kind, else why the doing? Nature sets the example in her deepest snowfall as in her falling orchard fruit. It is what men do, rather than what they borrow from an artificially sustained creed, that makes them humane and lovable.

One thinks much of humankind and of human ways, when most profoundly touched with the simplicity and beauty of the common things that lend their charm to the sketch of a single day, even in the woods and fields. Some people are hardly more than walking sticks, endowed with vitality and some sort of a soul. The soul has a complexion and a physiognomy, a countenance of its own, as does the face, that serves it as a mask, though some seem unaware of the fact. The absence of soulful quality is as discernible in the face as would be any of its characteristics.

One who sees in the natural distribution of things about him something to admire, be it no more than a wilding flower, and whose admiration for it is sincere and heart-felt, is in some degree a poet. George Eliot says: — "To be a poet is to have a soul so quick to discern that no shade of quality escapes it, and so quick to feel that discernment is but a hand playing finely ordered variety on the chords of emotion — a soul in which knowledge passes instantaneously into feeling, and feeling flashes back as a new organ of knowledge." One may be a poet and not be able to make a line of written poetry. The soul sings to itself what it cannot sing to others, and this is the rarest poetry of all. People are like musical instruments under the master's hand, with here and there a discord, or a note out of

tune. The boy who looks out upon the yellow levels of buttercups with a thrill of delight is as much the painter, in his soul, as the one who, with brush, fastens their fleeting beauty to his canvas, though in less degree. A painted buttercup, like poetic thought written out, like a bird-song translated into speech of men, is the intelligent expression of this "feeling." There are both speech and song in the picture. There is a poetic inspiration in both.

A brilliant tone of color in Nature, like a line of beauty in a school-boy's copy-book, or the grace-note in a bar of music, is a suggestion of something else. The color-tone may be pitched lower down among the siennas and sombre umbers, the line may be coarsely, clumsily drawn, but it tells the same truth as its fellow higher up the scale, though it may not be so elaborate or attractive. Nature carries abundant suggestion of all these in her variety and change, paint her pictures as she will. It has been long years since I left her by-ways and every-day life, but, like Michael Angelo, "I carry my satchel still," and there are many unfinished as well as finished sketches within its familiar depths. Let me show you a single sketch from this satchel of mine. Not long since, I saw a team of oxen hauling a huge stick of timber down one of the thoroughfares of the city. The day was one of winter's coldest, clearest, and the

heavily loaded "bobs" sang their creaky song along the snow-packed highway, calling people to look at their magnificent burden, this monarch of the woods, as it went its way to the mast-yards, to be stripped of its thick black bark, and smoothed with draw-shave and plane into the shapely mast, that is to be stepped into some goodly ship, to sail around the world. What a romance was written along the length of this stalwart mountain-pine! The muzzles of the sturdy red oxen and their wide flanks are frescoed with the crystallized breath of winter. What pungent smell is this that steals across the street? but I hear the lusty shout of the driver, —

"Waugh-osh!"

"Gee Buck; what yer doin' thar!"

"Huh-Bright up!"

He wields his ox-goad bare-handed, as a knight his lance. How it glistens in the sunlight, never whiter or more brilliant, this rustic weapon! This fellow, like his oxen and huge mast-stick, grew among the hills. His wind-toughened face is half-hidden in a bush of sandy whiskers, that are better than wrap for the neck. A black slouch hat is on his head; a jerkin of home-made stuff in white and blue takes the place of an overcoat, and, with trousers of like rough material, tucked into stout cow-hide boots that seemed the counterpart of a pair I once wore myself, the *tout*

ensemble is complete. What a picture of rustic, breezy manhood is this fellow, driving his team adown these avenues of the New Civilization, and never more unconscious of the *genre* picture his advent brings to town!

The smell of the barn comes with him. He cares not for the cold; he is used to it. I apprehend he has a feeling of pity for humanity on the sidewalk, with its hands mittened or gloved, and its head smothered in wrappings of fur. He scouts the thin blood that cries out for such cumbrous coverings. Himself a veritable child of Nature, right royally he bears her truest impress. What hints of rugged, homely sense and grit come with the straightforward glance of his clear blue eyes; and what other hints of well poised purpose balance themselves along the clear-cut lines of forehead and nose! A rare pride and strength lie along the curving lips that play at hide and seek beneath their tawny moustache. I think to myself, Ah, here is the stock of which men are made, as in this hundred feet of pine-tree is the material for the making of a mast. Who knows but what one might find upon this huge trunk the trace of the king's arrow, made by the mast-surveyor of Colonial days? Who knows but this stalwart teamster's remote ancestor was one of Concord's farmer heroes? I doubt not but this mast-stick was a large tree then.

The oxen throw jets of steamy breath straight out from their nostrils, as they answer the hail of their driver for a stout pull up the sharp rise of the street; and so they go over its crest on their way to the wharves, the sleds singing and creaking in a shrill-voiced accompaniment to this winter pastoral that has strayed away from the inland hills and valleys.

II.

I FIND another sketch that was made years ago, that is not less pleasant than the one the reader has just seen. Amid the glimmering splendor of a snow-white landscape I see the low, black roofs of clustering barns and their outlying sheds. I hear the clattering of unloosed bows, the rattle of stanchion-chains, and the muffled, uneasy tread of the horn-shod cattle as they hasten through a narrow linter-door into the snow-drifted barn-yard. Above the barred gateway of the ample yard I see the white spears of cattle-horns glancing in the morning sun. I hear the snow-smothered sound of rattling, down-dropping bars. The cattle are going to the old watering-place under the hill. Slowly, and one by one, the oxen lead the way down over the sharp crest of the ten acre lot below the highway, along the upper edge of which

are grouped the ancient farm-buildings; the steers follow closely behind, and then come the cows with their stubby horns and shrunk udders and glossy, short-haired coats, pictures of sober staidness, and, last of all, the last season's calves, with their long hair all awry as with short, nervous step they make up the procession to the spring just within the margin of the wood, the snuggest, warmest corner in all the pasture. It is a proud array of kine that winds its way down the sinuous track, through deeps of snow, wind-piled and drifted into the semblance of a white, choppy sea, and that sleep arow in the long tie-up that runs the whole length of the larger hay-barn. How narrow is this pathway! so narrow, indeed, that if the leader stops in his progress either way the trail is clogged until he moves on. How they hook and prod each other with their curved spears, in their haste to get out of the keen-bladed wind, for the crest of this slope was the runway for every winter gale! How the wind blows on this day in particular! The depth of three feet above the surface of the snowy field is a mass of wind-driven snow-crystals. So with lowered heads, with backs rounded up against the stiff north-west wind, the last of the herd has disappeared over the slope. I follow their track through this immaculateness of winter, its stain of the uncleanliness of the linter-floors, with my eye, until it passes without

the shelter of the long sheds, where it is obliterated by the brush of the wind.

No sooner are the cattle well out of the barn than the snow-embargoed hens are busily scratching among the shorts in the shallow cribs after a stray kernel of corn or a grain of meal, with the occasional interruption on the part of some pullet that has laid her mistress an egg and who hastens to tell the hen community of her achievement. What a chorus ensues! It is a sort of vocal constitutional these feathered people indulge in upon such occasion; and the uproar is a combination of all sorts of hen dialects in one, for here are Plymouth Rocks, Cochins, Brahmas, and the farmer's wife knows what all, agog with Henny-penny's gossip of her own private affairs. The hen is truly feminine, as her pride and excitability over her domestic doings show. All things, big and little, call for equal ado and a like attention; but they make a good orchestra for the barn these dull winter days, and keep the cattle some sort of company, with their fussy ways and garrulous cackle. They make a good pot-pie at Thanksgiving time, and the mistress of the farm gets a nice gown for her chicken. As Beecher has said, "The greatest event in a hen's life is made up of an egg and a cackle." The same is true not infrequently of men whose greatest achievements are of minor importance, of which the world is never

done hearing. The farm-horse whinnies to be led to water, but, in this instance, is the last to be served. There is an art in the doing of the chores at the barn. How clean the long linter looks after it has been purged of its soiled bedding and newly sprinkled with wheat-chaff from the straw-scaffolds! But what pungent odors linger about the stanchions and the wide floors! There is health in the smell of the cattle tie-up. Here is a panacea for lung and throat troubles, in this ammoniated atmosphere. How the nostrils dilate at its inbreathing! It is like the scents from the newly ploughed ground, only a thousand times increased. It is the concentration of life-giving soil-strength, the pledge of fertility. By what rare processes of Nature is its rank pungency transmuted into the perfumed blush of the northern clover or the rarer sweet of the humble honeysuckle? As homely as its contemplation may be, the manure-heap of the barn-yard is the compensation that Nature insists upon in exchange for her rich yield of fruit and grain. It is the philosopher's stone to the farmer. Its treasures of phosphates and ammoniacal salts lend their rare quality to the sun-tanned complexion of grape and pear, as to the amber-bearded wheat and yellow Indian corn. Its inherent quality of productivity and reënforcement of Nature's needs is ample excuse for its pungent and, to some, offensive perfume.

In imagination I untie a stout rope halter in the horse-stall, and lead its inmate out through the barn, out across the sunny yard, with its southern outlook, hedged in at all the other points of the compass with low, sloping, snow-laden roofs, out into the white waste of the field. The cattle-tracks of a half-hour ago are blown full of snow, and I follow the barely perceptible ridge or drift, which always backs up to the windward side of the path, more by the feeling of the snow under my tread than by any visual aid. I remember when this smooth hill-side was a ledgy, rock-piled pasture, when every crevice among its outcropping ribs of granite owned its nest of mottled adders, the only creeping things for which I had a boyish dread. I have not quite gotten over the feeling in these later days. I have seen as many as half a hundred of these oviparous rock-dwellers killed in a single day's ploughing, and have known them to be encountered and killed, one or more, every day through the summer season in this very field; but, like the wolf and otter of the woods, the rattle-snake and this more dandified adder recede as man encroaches upon their unreclaimed domain; and I doubt if a sharp search about this field nowadays would show a single adder basking upon the ledges in the hot summer sun — this fellow's royal pastime, unless it is playing havoc with the eggs and fledglings

of the sparrows, and other ground-nest builders. I once saw an adder climbing up through a thorn-bush's net-work of limbs, dodging their long, slender thorn-needles, with no less an object than a brood of tiny yellow-birds, and he seemed to have no difficulty in getting well up into the tree. I let the fellow climb almost to the rim of the nest, as I wished to see how much of a tree-climber he was, and then I sent a stone whizzing into the bush. His snakeship stopped his ascent, twisting his head to one side in a dazed sort of a way, and then slid rapidly to the ground, where I buried his secret with himself, to the evident satisfaction of the parent-birds, who seemed stupefied, rather than in a high state of excitement, as they watched the progress of the adder toward their nest.

But how the wind smites one's face in these mid-January days. I apprehend my companion does not fancy the wind's taking such arrant liberties with his long, flowing mane and tail of chestnut color. He throws up head and heels in turn, laying his delicately pointed ears flatly back, and with now and then a sharp pull at the halter his complaint is ended. It is only a good-natured protest, this restiveness under the provocation of the snow-weaponed winds. It is a human quality.

Half-way to the rim of the woods the pitch of the slope is like that of a steep house-roof, down

sharply against the edge of the beech-woods. At its foot is a long line of broken stone and débris of the ledges, that makes a good enough barrier against the encroachment of the cattle on its pasture-side in summer, roughly thrown together and unbuilt as it is; and many a time, on a wild coast, I have jumped my rude country-sled over its ragged ramparts, hidden as they were under a glittering March crust, to pull up amid the jungle of leafless white-thorn, that made the abatis-edge of the woods below; and sometimes, striking the entrance of the old logging-wood, I have not stopped until among the tall spruces, that were ever willing to pay their humble tribute of amber solace, that hung, oftentimes, from some outreaching knot in shapely transparent pendants — "tits" they were, according to the nomenclature of boyhood. What an outlook of winter one gets from this upland crest! Far below are the beeches, the stalwart hemlocks in their black garb, the firs, that serve as a bit of evergreen trimming to this great temple or body of deciduous trees, a mass of pearly-gray color, warm and soft, with the clear winter sunshine filtering through the open net-work of their leafless branches. There are hints of rare shades and colors in the beech-tree tops that lie so still at my feet while the wind is "doing" its forty miles an hour easy-like along this hill-slope, jumping

the trees just under the hill to ruffle the pine-woods into a sea of grayish green half a mile beyond, as if this child of Eurus was no less than the fabled possessor of the Ogre's seven-league boots, the history of which, in those days, was closely connected with the fortunes of the Duchess of Draggletail.

It is at the southerly corner of these beech-woods that the spring is hidden. Above, below, and beyond it, for miles and miles up and down the valley, even to the very foot-hills of New Hampshire's White Hills, it seems an unbroken wilderness of woods. Look south or west: hardly a dozen farm-houses are in sight. Here seems to be a primitive country in this garb of midwinter. The long chain of meadows, scarce a half-mile away, is barely suggested by its sagging line or fold in the matted tops of the woods, except by the gable of a single barn. There is hardly a wrinkle in this figured tapestry-fabric of the tree-tops, with its predominant tone of drab, so smoothly is it laid across the breadth of widening lowlands. One sees as many colors in the winter as in the summer woodland, but they are to be searched for if they are to be seen. They are all about and within the winter landscape, and would show the more readily did not the white-winged winter troubadours, the flying snow-flakes, pitch the tone to their color-song on such a barren

staff, a staff ice-rimmed and smothered with crystal drifts, with hosts of snow-buntings for notes. It is a rare picture that is hung against the sky when the west is flushed with the brief splendor of a winter sunset, when this sea of forest is flooded with a glory that is simply indescribable, and when every upward-pointing twig is tipped with flame and swimming in an atmosphere every atom of which is a particle of reflected gold. What a world of color in the sky above, and on the snow-levels beneath, tinted with the faintest suggestion of crimson! What strong high-lights gild the rails and stakes in the fences along the uplands, such as one finds hints of in the garb of these bird-dwellers of the winter woods, the buntings, finches, the red-polls, and the pine grosbeak. It is no wonder that these winged wanderers chance to steal something of the hue of the sky as they dart hither and thither through it.

Just under the hill the path comes out more distinctly, for here the snow is asleep among the tops of the ferns and the ground-hemlock, the creeping yew of the New England pastures. The cattle have not hurried here, once out of the wind, and their track winds in and out among the dwarf thorns and scrub-pines in an indolent sort of a way, as if the oxen had stopped to browse upon some winter tidbit that came in sight. Down

nearer the woods the trail divides into several others, like the delta of a stream, but all come together again at the spring.

I have thought often, as I came upon these watering-places in the woods, that I might liken them to the faces of people I knew, and whose facial characteristics had something of similarity, only to find upon comparison a marked dissimilarity. There are always the same brown and green carpetings of velvety mosses and tender herbage about them and their thresholds; the same pellucid stream of sweet waters; the same overhanging deeps of foliage in summer and the same low-swaying, leafless limbs in winter; the same winding approaches through the black loam and ooze of muck; and, with some exceptions, the same gnarled prodigal of the apple-orchard, dropping its brownish gray leaves and streaked wild fruit into the liquid-filled cup beneath it. Just at this time of the year, these attractions are absent, as the thick coverings of the snow have hidden much of its summer carpeting, and only the evergreens wrap their shadows round about such vagrant strips as the sun and warm waters of the spring have laid bare. Here are two apple-trees, the guardian spirits of this beautiful home of the water-nymphs; with wide-branching tops, with here and there a frozen apple clinging to the slender, tapering fingers of twigs that are barely

ever stirred by rude winds. It is not singular that the snow should be so well trodden about their rugged trunks by the cattle; for a frozen apple is in some sort a dainty to the barn-fed herd, and this is one of their loitering-places after they have quenched their thirst at the never failing — in winter or summer — stream, hardly a rod away.

I was as fond of these frozen apples as were the cattle. When apples were abundant, these trees were often left untouched by the farm-folk, and many a winter foray was made among their leafless tops to garner what had been left by the November winds and the squirrels of their frost-bitten fruit. Months before, the apples had been gathered in the orchards and carted to the old cider-mill; and their juices, pressed out, were stored in the dark cellar of the old homestead, where they grew sour and "hard," and only fit for dyspeptics or the vinegar-barrel. The soft, yielding, delicious flavor of their earlier days has departed, and a sharp, biting, acidulous quality has come instead; but the memory of their sweetness lingers. A sip of new cider dripping fresh from the press is like the breath of apple-blossoms, possessing much of their subtle aroma and generous suggestion; but how different this amber-colored treasure of the earlier winter, impoverished by lack of its natural associations, its sunshine and tree-saps, its delicate

pulp and ruddy, hermetic coverings, grown thinner and lighter-colored by feeding upon its own sweets. It is like the vigorous tree itself, self-willed, virile, and suggestive of the biting flavor of the apple-twig from which the ripened fruit dropped as the October suns went down day after day. Many a basket of these brown frost-bound apples from the trees over the spring in this snuggest corner of the woods found their way up over the hill to the farm-house, after the winter school was over and the stout crusts had come with their sparkle and exhilaration, to be emptied into the big milk-pans and set beside the fireplace to thaw. The portable cheese-press, with its wooden lever and basket of cobble-stones, would be brought into the kitchen, and, with the thawed apples tied in a stout bag and placed in the ash cheese-hoop, the round bit of pine board in place and the lever at last adjusted, the improvised cider-mill was in active operation.

It was a delightful anticipation that greeted the first trickling drops of the amber stream that made way for the flood that was to follow. How thirsty I was until I had tasted this nectar fresh from the heart of winter! It was a wild flavor this woodland fruitage owned, with its hints of frost and wind and snow, its mystery of woodland acquaintance. It smacked of woodland odors, of rustling leaves and of hoyden out-door dwellers. Ah, here is something fitting with which to toast Nature!

Here is Life, Virility, Strength in this current of molten amber, and Food. No wonder the cattle haunt these trees for their favors. Nature's children know her secrets better than Man, with all his wisdom. It was not an infrequent event that the apple-trees by the roadside were visited, as I went my way to the winter school, for a stray apple left by the apple-gatherer, and as well overlooked by the chipmonks; and at the school-house, deposited in a dark corner of the desk, it was left to thaw while the lessons went on to one recess or another, when it was made to supply food and drink to the ever hungry boy. Not less welcome was the sight of a tree among the pasture-birches that had escaped the notice of the thrifty farmer, when out with gun after the rabbits that were always so plenty in Knight's Woods, tired and hungry and thirsty with so much trudging through the winter snows. How tempting and appetizing these waifs of autumn! There was a rare vigor and exhilaration in the melting frost-crystals of a winter-stranded apple. Bitter and unpalatable as it may have been in October, it has been mellowed and tempered by wind and snow into a delicious confection. How freely it gives out its juices under the coaxing heat of one's mouth! These delights are not overdrawn, simple and hearty as they seem. They are real to one who has enjoyed them, and, once tasted, are never to be forgotten.

They are a part of the largess of Nature, nor are they dropped at one's door; they must be gone after to be possessed. They are no gratuitous gift, but are to be earned like all other good things.

Looking back over the way I have come, only the broken, uneven face of the pasture, and the steep slope of the ten-acre lot, with its barrier of rambling walls, and near its top, a bit to the north, its thick clump of sumac-bushes, is in sight; unless the square, red chimney of the hip-roof farm-house, with a single glimpse of a pointed barn-gable, and the topmost ribs of the elm-tree's swaying, shapely dome over all, may make the perspective of this uplook. North of the cattle-trail are acres of hoary beeches, with immense trunks closely huddled together with their barricade of low-hung limbs that reach straight out into the opening, and that rise above each other; tier upon tier of gray *chevaux-de-frise*, that lend a finish to this interweaving of branch and tiny twig that hold up the roofs of these hard-wood growths. Southward and eastward are the stunted sapling-pines, the cones of the spruce and fir; as shapely as if trimmed by some landscape-gardener; the limbs of which reach to the base of their pitch-stained trunks, making, with their dark, close-knit foliage, impenetrable jungles; and which afford hiding-places for the foxes and rabbits, and,

as well, an excellent cover for that beautiful game-bird of Maine, the *bonasa umbellus* of the ornithologist, the partridge of the outlying woodlands of the farm. The pasture follows the southerly trend of this evergreen growth a half-mile or more, and within its margin is the stalking-ground for all the pot-hunters of the region hereabout. As wary and difficult to approach as is this beautiful and well known bird, its instinct was hardly a safeguard against the stealthy cunning that, in the latter days of August of each year, crept, with noiseless step and old-fashioned muzzle-loading-gun, over the thousand-ply carpet of sienna-dyed needles that were constantly dropping from the matted tops of these lowland *Coniferæ.* The floor of these woods is marvellously clear of all underbrush, except here or there a "drumming-log" or a clump of red-fruited thorn; and the partridge-stalker may discover his game at a considerable distance down these silent, tree-shadowed aisles, if his eyes are trained to his sport. Hardly has the bird discovered its enemy than it has straightened up as motionless as the pine-knot beside it, and which it much resembles, at this particular moment, for a swift flight; there is a puff of white smoke, and another trophy has been acquired to swell the number of slaughtered birds of a single season to a "hundred-odd," and by a single pot-hunter! This is but the outline of a tragedy that

marks the incoming or outgoing of every day for the season — a season often inaugurated before the close-time has expired, and as often prolonged into the bleak winter days, when the feeding-grounds of these birds are covered with deep snows; and when these half-famished woods-people are driven into the apple-tree tops of the orchard after a lunch off their brown, succulent buds. There is a small sense of fairness to some people, such is their desire for acquisition. To them, everything and everybody are lawful prey. They are a prey to themselves. It does not take such people a great length of time to get so powder-posted, so afflicted with dry-rot, that their neighbors can see clear through them, and estimate their exact worth to the community at large, as if they were weighed in a pair of Fairbanks' most delicately adjusted scales. The trouble with such people is, they cannot see themselves as they really are, or even as others see them. The human biped, without some sense of equity, some spark of generous manliness, is not far removed from a brute. I am afraid if Circe should happen through this world, in these modern days, that a larger herd of swine would follow in her train than that which knew her in her famous island in the days of Ulysses.

From the spring into the interior of the woods, their floors slope downward, being the continua-

tion of the water-shed of which the hill-slope below the barns makes the steepest part. It is not a great way into the swamps, with their deep quagmires and treacherously snow-hidden muck-holes; but the cattle never leave the solid ground for these quicksands of the swamps. Sometimes an ox or a cow is missed from the herd and is never found. Then it is that the solution of their disappearance is held within the treacherous silence of these swamps. How warmly the sun caresses this woody alcove, where the only hint of the winds that scour the upland with such fierce haste is the noiselessly falling snow-crystals that sail slowly down from the upper heights of the brilliant sunlighted air, or the creaking of some lank, homely body of maple-tree, that

"Like Pisa's leaning miracle,"

lopped over against some stalwart spruce, the top of which sways back and forth as the wind from the hills smites its black plume towering above the woodland levels. It is an unceasing complaint, this monody of rasping note; but in the woods, on a windy day, it is a sound that one hears all about his pathway. But what the trees were trying to tell me I could never surmise; and if you have tried the experiment for yourself these sounds are very hard to locate. One tree will have a series of notes, a gamut of its own; another will

have a single note, but so delicately shaded is this note or tone with sharps and flats, with half-tones and tones, and suggestions of the same tone, that you are uncertain whether it is one tree or another. It is a lonesome sort of speech on a winter day, for there is a suggestion of chill in its impoverishment and lack of tone-quality ; but, for all that, it lends some semblance of sound to the otherwise deep silence of the forest. One sees scores of birds here on winter days, but they rarely speak or sing. As friendly as they are, and grotesque as is their behavior, they are as silent as the drowsy woods about them, unless the black-cap titmouse, with his undertone of

"Chewêêk-a-dee-dee-dee, chewêêk-a-dee-dee-dee,"

as Samuels translates it, lends his sweet voice to break the monotony of the soughing wind-music as it drones its way through the barren tops of the trees. But are the trees ever barren? Beecher gives expression to a beautiful thought when he speaks of them as the "living trees." He says, "Leaves die, but trees do not. They only undress. Leafless as they are, they are hardly barren."

III.

In this snug corner of the woods I find the same tree-family as ever inhabit the wet places, with one or two additions; and their stout, shapely trunks, sharply drawn against the snow, make exquisite pictures in black and white. Only the canoe-birch is noticeably absent; but its cousin is here, in garb of shimmering yellow, and in abundance. Through the gap in the pines at my right I catch a glimpse of the snow-white body of a canoe-birch; but it is the only one in sight, and its lower trunk is scarred and covered with brown patches where the boys have torn away its white bark for numerous buckets for their berries, or, more like, their garnering of beech-nuts, or for a drink out of this boiling outlet of a single water-artery of the hill-side. I have on many a hot summer day borrowed a bucket or drinking-cup of this tree myself, and never without a spirit of thankfulness, as I have tasted the ineffable flavor of its enchantments, the royal quality of its hospitality. The canoe-birch is the courtier among trees, in its dress, in its daintiness, and its generosity. It has ever seemed to me the favorite of the woodland deity.

The new trees are those of the ash family, and within the radius of less than a hundred feet I find all three of the species, the red, white, and black, the latter of which is indeed one of the treasures of the woods, for it is the basket-maker's tree. It is a shapely body, this tall, upright black ash, with its clean, well clad limbs in winter, with snug-fitting rind, and its close-knit foliage of pinnate leaves in summer, richly dyed with deepest purple just before the fall rains come to rake them from their stout twigs. It is the cooper's tree, as it is the basket-maker's, and even here in its lowland home it is not plenty. The finding of a shapely black-ash trunk, like the finding of a hog-yoke, is a prize, and is to be marked or located wherever found. The bark of the ash is the natural home of the lichen, and along the southerly side of this one I find some beautiful specimens. Here are large shields of a bright yellow color, with a texture as soft as velvet, and some smaller ones, tinted with hints of scarlet, with light blue, and a rare drab that reminds one of summer clouds.

There are charming as well as familiar pictures in these lichen-bound albums of ash-bark. Within this disk of olive-green clinging to the rough coat of this friend of the cooper and basket-maker, I see a narrow highway, stretching out to northward from a gauntlet of tall pines, a rib-

bon of white unwinding from somewhere beyond the Rattlesnake Hills, reaching out between the orchards, and up past an old, yellow farm-house, with its lofty "sweep" overtopping its story-and-a-half gable. Along both sides of this dusty ribbon of a country road are hedges of mammoth alders, as lean and gaunt and scrawny, in their rinds of blackish green, as they well can be, with hosts of kalmias, of high-bush blueberry, and tangle of blackberry and raspberry vines, that almost hide from the sight of the wayfarer the ancient, moss-covered, and tumble-down wall that keeps this more ancient highway decrepit company.

A tall sugar-maple stands beside this old wall, in the opening; and just above it, on the opposite side, in the orchard, there is a gap in the like ancient board fence, and here in this gap is a black, weather-stained building, with huge square-topped chimney surmounting its low, one-story roof, and within its deep shadows below is a fireplace and a wide stone hearth that fills the width of the gable. I put my ear to the crinkly lichen, and I hear the crackle of the red-oak shavings burning briskly in their iron "jack," hedged round with its cordon of hooped oaken staves. I see the red flame leaping from this huge chimney, and smell the pungent smoke of burning oak; and what a savory perfume it is! This is one of boyhood's winter homes of Romance, this old cooper-shop

by the wayside. Now, the silence of the snow is round about it, and I catch the sound of the men at work with their keen draw-shaves, stripping the deep, amber-colored shavings from the unseasoned, newly riven red-oak staves fresh from the woods and full of frost. How full of sound the bark of this black ash is! I hear the creaking of the windlass, as its stout chain tightens about the stiff shook. I hear the rattle of the solid hoops the coopers throw over its top, and upon which, with brawny arms and swift strokes, they beat the "Cooper's March" —

"Ra-ta, ra-ta, ra-ta-ta-ta-ta, ra-ta,"

driving them down, down closer, closer still, bringing and binding the staves into the compact shape and more perfect resemblance of the hogshead that is to bring to us the sweets of the tropic cane-fields.

"Ra-ta, ra-ta, ra-ta-ta-ta-ta,"

and the shook is "set up" with maul and whistle and song, ready to be rolled to the big fireplace, with its stucco lining from the clay-beds in the meadows. How the fires roar within the hollow circles of oak, snapping betimes like a handful of Chinese crackers! There are no summer songs of this old shop in this music of the ash, unless of swallows' twitterings under its dusky eaves,

or of robins nesting within its shadows, along a single one of its clumsy beams, or of pewee complaining from its low-set gable, while the wind plays a soft accompaniment through the countless cracks in its ancient boarding, and the air is filled with drifting blossoms or hints of abundant fruitage, or when the clouds drift down across the orchard-tops, to leave them dripping wet, to trip on, on, all day long, and through the night, with pattering feet, up one side and down the other of its low, black roof, to make the pastoral of the rain.

This making of the hogshead is the most charming of the winter idyls by the wayside, for amid its dancing lights and shadows lies much of homely thrift and homely enjoyment. The staves, "set up" with maul and hoop, are taken to the fire, and wheeled over the blazing "jack," and the fire burns on and on until its inner surface is charred, and the fibres of its oaken body are scorched and stiffened beyond relaxation, by its ordeal of heat. "Chamfered and trimmed," the shook is "knocked down" to be packed into a compact bundle, when it is the work of a moment with the sharp adze to deftly trim the ends of the black-ash "binder," whip it about the odorous shook and cut the notches that interlock with a firm grip, and thus the cooper's handiwork is ready for the market. Making shook in those times was a species of knitting-work for

the men on the farm who had the good-fortune to know something of the trade; and there were no labor unions in those days, no strikes or lock-outs. It always began with the nightfall of the short winter afternoons, after the lumbermen had come out of the woods for the day, and the evening's work was over at nine o'clock. The old cooper-shop of those days, with its low-studded walls and sloping rafters, smoke-begrimed and rain-stained, and its paraphernalia of the shook-maker, was a neighborhood resort of a winter evening, a rare place for story-telling and rustic joking, in which vulgarity had small place, for its presiding genius was a gray-haired, kindly hearted man, in whose old one-horse shay of the thorough-brace pattern, I had taken many a part-way ride to school and home again, and whose good wife is remembered more by reason of her *penchant* for cats, which was something remarkable, than for anything else that I can remember. Hardly less than a score of cats might be counted about the premises at any time. It was a queer liking, and an unaccountable one, as it was old-fashioned. This ancient yellow house, dull-colored and grim with neglect, was known among the children as "Cat's Paradise;" and it was not misnamed.

A single cedar, with hosts of brownish drab ribbon-ends hanging from trunk and limb, dips its scrawny roots of rich sienna color into these

sparkling waters, lending their color to the tiny stream; but it must be of an odd turn to live so much among strangers, for this is the only one of the cedar family to be found in these woods. Cedars are as scarce here as white crows, almost, though I have in mind a well authenticated instance of a white crow being seen some years ago on one of these upland farms. Doubtless, the soil conditions are not favorable, else this emigrant would be sending for his relatives to come and keep him company. There are freaks in Nature here as elsewhere, and this lone cedar-tree is one of them. How it came here, unless transplanted by some boyish hand, I do not know; but its smell is aromatic and refreshing enough in its pungency. One side of the tree is polished smooth where the cattle have rubbed their necks and shoulders up and down, after their habit when they wish to be curried.

The horse has gone to the barn long ago, with the halter securely tied about his neck; but the cattle are still nosing about in the snow, and browsing off the deep-colored twigs of the yellow birches, or are chewing their cuds with slow complacence. While I wait for the calves to get their fill at the spring, I find myself reading the morning news in the snow. Hosts of society items are written out upon the snowy sheet that lies open at my feet. Here is a single line reaching

out from the foot of this tall pine, and here are sprinklings of pine-cone chips and reddish cone-dust. It is a kind of type used by the common red squirrel, who leads a more secluded life in winter than in summer. The decayed top or hollow trunk of some hard-wood tree, such as the maple, the birch, or the oak, where he keeps his winter stores, is his favorite dwelling-place. Though the red squirrel comes out of his house on winter days, it is a rare thing to see one, and more rare to hear his shrill, taunting whistle when you cannot but think he is poking all sorts of fun at you, jerking his bushy tail at every cachinnation. I expect the squirrel thinks boys terribly dull and pokey because they do not race around the tree-tops like himself. He is a knowing fellow, for he keeps well out of sight, for the owls, like all expert telegraphers, read by sound as well as by sight, and they do not scruple to indulge their always whetted appetites upon good occasion.

It is evident that many of the woods-people are abroad this morning, for the tracks of these four-footed snow-shoers cross and intercross in every direction, like so many telephone-wires, and each carries its own message. Here is the message of the gray squirrel in this chain-stitch sort of a track, and, if I could translate its repetition of the same characters, I should decipher something like

this out of it, — "I have gone to neighbor S.'s barn after a nubbin of corn." There is no telling when he will return, or by what route, but I surmise he will come down the old highway of his kind, the pasture-fence, a way which he and his family hold by prescription and years of adverse user, and that runs from the woods to the highway, an unbroken, uninterrupted roadway along its topmost rails. He is a sly body, and makes the trip in safety. He moves among the highways of the tree-tops like a shadow, so noiseless is his step and so like them is he in his color. The gray squirrel is very suspicious of intruders into his domain. One's entrance within the shadows of his home is the signal to him to maintain utter silence. He is not only quiet, but he is absolutely motionless. A score of these woodland acrobats may be about you, but, until they begin their travels from tree to tree, you may not discover them, for their color is so nearly akin to that of the bark of the maple, beech, or oak that our gray-coated friend is almost indistinguishable against the background upon which his living portrait is painted, and his footstep is as noiseless as the sleepy winds of summer. It is only the tip of his fluffy, gray tail, blown up from the top of the limb, that betrays him, but that is enough to the sharp-eyed boy, whose instinct tells him much that goes on behind him as well as before.

The true woodsman makes his ears serve as eyes, and very good eyes they are.

Sit down upon some moss-covered log, or against some small tree, a sapling maple for instance, only let it be something behind which you may look without too much trouble, and keep perfectly still. You will not have to wait long, and you will catch the indefinable speech of softly swaying limbs above or behind you. Wait a moment: there it is again; the rhythm of lightly bending sprays of hemlock. Look quickly up and you will see the self-same squirrel that was hiding a moment before, making his way through the hemlock-tops, with here and there a running leap, with tail spread out to its fullest width behind for a rudder. Keep still a bit longer. You will have ample chance to watch the antics of a half-score more of these beautiful creatures. The gray squirrel is out all winter long, only he changes his house when the snow comes. This winter he is snugly domiciled in yonder maple, the body of which runs up to such a height without a limb. The snow about its base is spattered with bits of bark from the running up and down of its dweller. When the buds on the tips of the beech-twigs begin to burst open, the gray squirrel goes house-hunting, and if, perchance, he finds an old crow's nest that suits his liking, he prëempts at once, and moves his chattels and himself to this sum-

mer residence, as it were, without further ado. Mrs. Squirrel must appreciate this method of "spring cleaning," for they rarely return to the old quarters with returning winter, but select some new hibernacle, from which they sally forth to visit the barns and corn-cribs, the whereabouts of all which they well know. I have noticed the gray squirrels do not seem to be so shy in winter as in summer, for they were more noticeable about the old farm-house in the snow-bound season of the year than in warmer weather. This may be the result of hunger, but it is a trait as common to the winter birds of New England as it is to the gray squirrel.

From the depths of a thick-foliaged fir-tree runs a beautiful footprint, reminding one of a bit of outline-embroidery upon a white ground of "butcher's linen." It is a maze of twistings and turnings, but it is a tell-tale track nevertheless, for only the partridge can set such an exquisite pattern. If you follow it a bit, you will notice where it has disappeared in the snow, leaving a sort of blur at the end of this line so beautifully written. If the bird had mounted into the air for a flight, the sentence would have been cut short, but here is a bit of punctuation that is not found in the books. The partridge has started upon a burrowing expedition, a subterranean journey, as it were, under the snow. The track is a recent one, and you

need not be surprised if this snow-tunnel builder burst from his retreat right under your nose, scattering the snow-crystals right and left in his hasty flight. Partridges have a winter habit of burrowing in the snow for long distances, but it is as likely to prove a prison as a shelter, for, with the milder changes in the weather that come with mid-February, a slight rainfall and a single cold night will build a roof of crust over their heads that condemns the unfortunate birds to a lingering starvation. When the cattle are driven to the spring in mid-afternoon, I often find the partridges "budding" in these apple-trees or in the tops of the yellow birches. They rarely fly at my approach, or show little of the alarm that is common when their haunts are invaded by the sportsman in the later fall. Sometimes the foxes find their snow-burrows, and a few scattered feathers only mark the place where Reynard has set his winter table. Many a time have I hesitated to shoot this bird until too late, so charmed have I been with its wild grace and remarkable beauty.

A bit down the stream of this spring, there is a faint suggestion of flight; a vague sense of something in motion — as if a shadow had taken tangible shape and life — is impressed on my mind. I whistle involuntarily, and, looking sharply, I catch a glimpse of two bright eyes set in an oval-shaped head that is surmounted by a pair of very long,

erect ears, and all so nearly the color of the surrounding landscape, the snow and gray wood-shadows, that their outlines, blurred and indistinct, are hardly distinguishable. How still the fellow is, and immovable upon his haunches, like a bit of rare sculpture! At the slightest motion upon my own part, he is out of sight with a swift, graceful leap. Plunging through the snow, I have found the imprint of rabbit's feet. The common rabbit is one of the beautiful wood-dwellers, changing his coat twice a year as he does. He has a suit of lightish brown for summer wear, and a dusty-miller suit for winter. He needs them to escape the predatory hawks and owls.

A sharp whistle will halt these forest-dwellers for a moment at least, and oftentimes at the cost of their lives. There is much curiosity exhibited by them at the hearing of strange sounds, and the hunter takes advantage of this peculiar characteristic at every opportunity. The fox, the crow, and as well the hawk and the squirrel, may be tolled from out their hiding-places by a fair imitation of the speech common to their prey. A well simulated hoot of the owl in the June woods, of a morning or of mid-afternoon, will gather the crows from far and near wherever the note has been carried by the wind; the imitation of the squeaky voice of the field-mouse will call the fox within easy gun-shot, or until he has snuffed alarm in the scent

of the intruder, and a sibilant sound made with the lips will call the chickaree or chipmonk from his hole in the roadside wall or in the woodland scurf.

The rabbit's writing on the snow is only an indentation, a sunken square made by the four hairy pads that serve him as feet, bunched together, and his footfall is almost as light as the snow that bears its impress, for all his strides are so long. I follow this track a few rods, into the thick hemlocks, and am startled by this Jack-in-the-Box of the underbrush leaping from under my shadow. I have not discovered him, so much like the woodland color is his surtout of winter fur. Timid as this fellow seems to be, he appears unable to hide himself. He rather trusts to silence and his swift leap for safety. It is a suggestive signature that the rabbit leaves in the snow, in which one reads much of the shrinking, nervous fear, the tremulous alertness, that lends such charm to his every movement. It is a fitting object of superstition, if anything can be such, that the African Hoodoo makes out of the rabbit's paw. If I were in want of a fetich, I should select the swift, light-falling pad of this fellow as quickly as I should anything. I should prefer it without the mystic ceremony of the negro sorceress, however efficacious such incantation might make it as a charm.

There is nothing in this sign-manual of the

rabbit like what I find in the running hand in which another society item is written out beside it, and that makes straight for the open pasture and the hill-slopes above. Here is a track made by four dainty feet, which, in its outline and peculiarity, speaks of a wariness and a cunning that betrays the red fox at once. I had not seen it before, but it follows the run up to the spring and into the cattle-path, where it has disappeared.

From these woods, over the uplands where the farm-buildings are clustered together, just a bit to the north, was a famous runway for the foxes; and after mid-February had come, with its stout snow-crust, Reynard might be seen, almost any morning, crossing the highway into the adjoining field or pasture, up or down, and rarely ever in a hurry, unless the hounds were out, which was not uncommon. Reynard is rare-witted, and skilled in field and wood craft; and, when hard-pressed, displays wonderful ingenuity in throwing his pursuers off the scent, which is always lighter or weaker on clear, dry days than when the air is charged with moisture. When the hounds are after him on a fresh scent, he often takes to the sleigh-track in the highway, as I have seen him do more than once, trusting, I have no doubt, to the fortunate passing of a team before they reach it, or picks his way along the walls or fences, making

use of every conceivable object that may aid him in his effort to escape.

Close by the margin of the woods is a thick-set colony of scrub-pines. Within their shadows is a huge outcropping of ledge, full of wide seams and mysterious openings. It is one of the dwelling-places Reynard chooses for his summer residence, and for the play-ground of the little Foxes, that are fairly well grown by mid-August. I have, in my boy-days, seen Mistress Fox out with her baby family of foxes on many an afternoon, having the merriest time imaginable; and, though I was quite near them at times, they kept up their play apparently unmindful of my intrusion. Just at dusk, I hear the sharp, petulant speech of Reynard playing at hide-and-seek among the falling shadows of the woods, something between a bark and a whine, and full of querulous discontent. It is a dolorous, scolding voice, that echoes through the twilight woods; a lonely, weird-like sound, pitched on a high key, like most nocturnal notes, that, when it dies away, leaves the silence of the summer night deeper and more noticeable.

A bit to the westward is the old Plantation, a lonesome enough place even in the broad sunlight; and here were numerous burrowing-places of this prowler among the farm-wife's chicken-coops, and from this wood-girt pasture-opening a chorus of rasping, discordant sounds would come

up to the barn, just after sundown. Along the hen-roosts there was always a stir of apprehension among the fowls, and a drowsy cluck always greeted the distant hail of Reynard. This woodland amphitheatre was the summer rendezvous of the fox tribe. It was the home of the veery and whippoorwill as well, whose notes were outlined as clearly as rain-drops in the morning sun, against the background of the fox's grating whine. I do not remember ever hearing the bark of the fox in the winter, or even after the snows had come, but it was rather an accompaniment to the spring piping of the frogs. One of the winter pastimes of the fox is the hunting of field-mice. After the snows have been washed away by the April rains, if you will take a walk in the fields, you may trace the winter highways of these rodents through the "fog" or dead grass. The stubble is plainly marked with hosts of arched passage-ways, or grass-covered galleries, made by the field-mouse in his winter peregrinations; and they are, some of them, very artistically constructed, and furnish excellent specimens of above-ground tunnel-building. A trudge through the snow, of any winter day, will betray Reynard's search for this winter tidbit in the numerous excavations and holes in the snow-covered fields — the deer-mouse, or field-mouse, as it is more familiarly known. This fellow is one of the most beautifully marked and

cleanly clad of his kind, and it is no wonder that the fox should regard him as a winter dainty.

The silver-gray fox is a rare animal in the Maine woods. But few have ever been seen in the region of Sebago pond, and to the northward of it; and, to my knowledge, but one has ever been captured in the near vicinage of my boyish haunts, and that was almost a half-century ago. If the farmer has been unfortunate enough to lose any of his cattle by sickness, it was

"Pull off the hide, and give it to the crows"

and foxes. So the carcass, hauled away into the pasture, and well "doctored" with strychnine, was given over to the poisonous baiting of the foxes, the skunks, and crows. In a month's time the bones would be picked clean by these carrion-eaters, but whether the mortality rates were increased among them was ever an uncertain question; at least, there never seemed to be any diminution in the numbers of either family. Some years the depredations committed by the foxes among the farm poultry were more marked than in others, when whole flocks would be plucked of their feathers, among the pasture-ferns, in a single midsummer month; other years hardly a fox would be seen the whole season. Of all the woodland-dwellers, the fox is a rover. A coward at heart, hunger makes him bold; so bold that I

have seen him dash into the barn-yard flock, to carry off the fattest fowl, in the hubbub created by his sudden onslaught. I do not think the loss of some dame Partlet was the cause of so much regret as the audacious appearance of the fox was surprising.

What a lithe, limber fellow he is, loping across the fields, or leaping walls and fences, when urged by his fear of the old house-dog; and how gracefully he carries his bush behind him! As wily as he is, he will blunder into the most clumsily set trap, as he will for weeks avoid that most adroitly set, for he is suspicion animate.

But here are hosts of bird-tracks among the hemlocks and pines; and in the low birch-trees hereabouts are scores of yellowish brown birds, with their crowns and sides splashed with dark red, that very much resemble the pine-finch. Look carefully, and you will find it to be the Lesser Red-poll, a very common winter visitor in northern New England. From the birches the red-polls make frequent excursions to the tall weeds in the fences, the fields, and pastures, to feed on their seeds; but there is, in these winter days, no more beautiful sight than to see a flock of these lively bird-folk pecking at the seeds of the birches and ice-bound alders in the lowlands, lending a rare animation to the leafless trees and bushes. They have a pretty habit of alighting

as nearly in a bunch, upon a single limb or twig, as may be, to forsake it in a body, flying closely together, and bounding along through the avenues of the woods to some better feeding-ground. They are bush-dwellers, and construct beautiful nests of Nature's finest, softest material, and, though a somewhat silent bird in winter, they, like other winged people, essay a few songful notes in their mating-season.

The snow-bunting is hail, fellow, well met, with the red-poll. Where you find the one you are like to find the other. They come with the harsh, snow-laden winds of December; and the deeper the snow, the more abundant the snow-bunting. They are the children of the winter gales, as Mr. Pennant says, "driving about most in a high wind." They soon learn when and where the housewife shakes the family table-cloth, and their visits to the farm-house door-steps are remarkable for their regularity, and where they eat their fill, all the time keeping up a half-audible chatter, that has no semblance of song. They are very tame, and are easily approached, as are the carmine-colored pine grosbeaks. The grosbeaks feed upon the small buds and cone-seeds of the fir-trees that are abundant in this locality, as the brownish olive finch does upon the seeds contained in the fresh cones of the pines. The grosbeak is a warbler, which is more than can be said of the other

fellow, who sets his table amid the pitchy cones of the pine-trees.

This warmest place in the woods is one of the favorite habitats of the New England birds. The white-bellied nuthatch is quite common, and takes the place of the downy woodpecker, as he is the bark-borer among the winter birds. The nuthatch is boon companion to the black-cap titmouse, a bird better known to the farmer boy by the familiar name of chickadee. The woodchopper knows him well, for, while the chips fly out from under the strokes of the axe, the titmouse watches every movement with a curiosity and concern that is amusing. He cocks his head sideways, looks up and down, hopping restlessly from twig to twig as if in great trouble that, Yankee-like, he cannot ask a few questions. He does his part in pantomime to perfection, saying all the time cheweek, cheweek, cheweek-a-dee-dee in a soft, clear tone, making in itself a perfect bar of music. I really should like to hear what he has to say. He is a great grub-eater, searching fruit-trees as well as the trees in the woodland for his food, and, like the bunting, he is a back-door visitor. He has the most cheerful disposition, and likewise a great way of ruffling his plumage so that he looks twice as large as he really is. Storm or shine, he comes to the farm-house door every day, in flocks of ten to fifty and more; and what

a whirling over and over flight is theirs, as they scurry for the woods, in the late afternoon, with the sun already an hour up, when they have finished their repast of bread-crumbs! I have noticed that all winter birds are more or less sociable and inquisitive. It is a charming quality of companionship, and enlivens the heart of the woodland wayfarer to an appreciable degree, for I have noticed that humanity is more susceptible of the presence of living things in the winter woods than when the gray limbs are draped in the woof of summer, and when there is so much more of palpitating life and song to attract the attention, and so much of pleasing color and motion.

Burroughs says the woods, in winter, are "rigid and tense, keyed up by the frost, and resound like a stringed instrument." This may be true of certain days, but generally the deeps of snow seem to absorb sounds, and only peculiar tones are transmitted to any great distance. The strokes of the wood-chopper's axe, on most winter days, drop within a certain radius groundward, like the chips that fly from its keen edge. It is only in certain directions, along certain atmospheric strata, that these sound-messages transmit readily. On other lines the wires are cut or out of working order. This is true of any day that does not precede the immediate coming of a storm. The woods are so still that sounds

which would ordinarily pass unnoticed, at a different season of the year, are not more perfect in their articulation, but seem to be so because such a multitude of other sounds are absent. I apprehend that the winter air is a better transmitter of sound, because its wires have less work to do, for I have thought the frost might have transformed the trees into storage batteries, and set them in fuller sympathy with the countless operators that handle Nature's instruments, now, if ever, in a supersensitive condition. It always seemed to me, however, for all the phenomena of sound-carrying quality, that the winter air was so blocked with snow-drifts that the sound was actually embargoed, and waiting for April to break out its roads.

The woods have nothing of harshness, nothing of hard tense character and rigidity, through the winter days, to myself. They are the rather soft and appealing in their influences, like immense draperies loosely woven and full of graceful folds. They are the sleeping-places of the Winds. It is only the bleak, open fields that suggest the iron hand of a Master. The rare beauty of a winter month, by day or night, is its immaculate purity, but it is as far from the cold beauty of the sculptor's ideal in marble as the sky is above the earth from which the marble was quarried. This blending of the leafless branches of the trees against

the sky is the "effect" that all ambitious artists seek after. It is one of Nature's truths in landscape mosaic. What a soft, pearly "effect" it is, and how hard to catch its approximate in value and fasten it upon the canvas! It is humanity striving after an impossibility.

How tall the bare trees hereabouts seem, and how dumpy the evergreens beside them! The air holds a superior quality of alertness, giving one a keener eyesight and making the ear more sensitive to outward vibration. The tympanum is keyed closer to the auditory nerve, the wire that carries the sound message to the brain. I discern the musical quality in sounds with greater ease and accuracy. In these days, the

"Chewêêk-a-dee-dee-dee, chewêêk-a-dee-dee-dee,"

of the titmouse is more like a song than at any other time of the year. No matter how weakly pitched this note may be, or how light its timbre, the imagination supplies all lack, so much does the Soul crave a bird-song in these gray, songless days. So, out of the paltry, faltering notes of this winter resident of the woods, the heart makes a song of its own. In winter, one's predisposition controls his outlook. Happiness is in some sense a plant rooted in the heart, its fruitage depending somewhat upon the attention that is bestowed upon its cultivation. It is a quality born of one's

own resources, rather than a direct importation into one's experiences. People make a mistake when they go away from home to find it or to purchase it, for the search for anything so elusive cannot be other than disappointing. So one finds in the winter woods whatever his heart bespeaks of disagreeable chill or robust, enlivening animation. The bare woods hedged about with deep snows make a kaleidoscopic picture that rarely looks the same to different individuals. Winter has the quality of bare strength and none of the enervating voluptuousness of summer. For flowers winter gives snow-flakes, and for perfumed winds gives driving snow-storms and bitter, freezing air. His coldest breath is a nectar that is more exhilarating than the dewy morning of June. What tightening of the body-tendons, what replenishing of the nerve-batteries that feed the brain, comes with these white-clad days of winter.

All the birds I have named are here in this snug corner of the woods, flitting from limb to limb or making tiny tracks in the snow, and watching me with the brightest of bird-eyes. They are rare company, and I am loth to leave them; but the cattle are already half-way up the steep hill to the barn, and I stumble up the narrow path after them. This is but a single jewel from Nature's winter necklace of brilliants, but not the least in interest or value. One sees much who

tries to see at all, and in this brief sketch the story is hardly begun. There is so much to tell about, one hardly knows where to begin his recitation of Nature's lessons. Nature teaches the science of economy to perfection, and he is a poor scholar indeed who does not learn something from her every day, for the man whose thoughts are not aroused by what Nature shows him from day to day has what one might call thought-inertia. Her text-books are all illustrated with the rarest of wood-cuts, etchings, and colors. She is the original object-lesson teacher, setting her tasks, from the easiest to the most difficult, in the snow, the swaying limbs of the trees, and in the sky as well as fields. One who does not know Nature's alphabet knows but little that is truly good, and is a great way from what God made him to be. There is but little humanity where there is little or no love for, or appreciation of Nature.

A WAYSIDE WATERING-PLACE.

A WAYSIDE WATERING-PLACE.

OLD roads are ever delightful company, but one is far from saying as much of a new highway, with its upturned, uneven surface, awkward enough to ride upon or walk over, at best, with hardly a stray weed to intrude upon its monotony of garish freshness of earthy colors, while along its ditches, that lend it sharpness and angularity of feature, are thrown out huge dirt-stained bowlders, tinged with brilliant ochres, and that have not yet been elevated to the moss-decorated peerage of the wayside, by the Rain. A newly constructed road in the country is like a new acquaintance whose attitude and ways are constrained and uncomfortable, and whose personal attractions lack the simple guaranty of likeableness.

This is more noticeable where the road surveyor has ploughed his vandal furrow through the woodland and lined it with dead tree-tops and upturned stumps, with their black, knotted roots reaching out toward the traveller in a forlorn, hopeless sort of a way. What ragged gaps the

road-builder has left in the living tree-tops, that look as if their wood-toilets had been suddenly interrupted, as, no doubt, they were, when the choppers came with their keen blades of steel, their relays of stout oxen with stump-pulling machines and ploughs, and all the paraphernalia of the rustic road-maker! It is here I have caught Nature *en déshabille* for once. But all roads were new once, growing wider and better, and more friendly and sociable, more safe and convenient, as the thorough-brace wagon superseded the horse and saddle-bags, as the Brewster side-bar has displaced the once aristocratic thorough-brace with its rugged, jolting discomfort. If our ancestors were never afflicted with that modern iconoclast of happiness, dyspepsia, there is good reason for it; for riding in the pioneer days was as productive of physical exhaustion and muscular irritation as came by walking, and I have no doubt, after all, the latter was the more preferable.

An old country-road is like a tree: it is one of the things that grow out-of-doors. It is never done growing, and, let well alone for a decade, it has outgrown everything and everybody but the cattle-folk. The bushes will have clasped hands across its faded-out, grass-choked ruts; and the red clover, the tall buttercup, the yellow-hearted daisy, and the vagrant fire-weed flaunt their

brightness in one's face as he wades through its deeps of fresh, harmonious color. Nature is a jealous mother, and resents these interferences and innovations of men with undisguised feeling; but there is a rare, sweet fellowship between these white lines of dirt, these human ear-marks along the face of the earth, and the springing grasses, the low tops of their luxuriant alders and net-work of birches, their tree-sheltered barriers of pasture-wall and sprawling rail fence and woodland shadow, the singing stream that flows under their bridges, and the winds that blow the snows from their ledgy thresholds on the hill-tops, or pile their wandering steps through the valleys full of unyielding drifts. There is a rare compan ionship, as well, between them and the wandering footstep that leaves its imprint among their lights and shadows. Many a time, as I have been mounting a bit of rise in the highway, I have fallen to watching the slow-creeping pace of the stake and rail fence as it went up the hill beside me. How long stretched out and tired it seemed, dragging its slow length to the topmost crest, and, once there, how it raced down the other side with me, as if to show me it was not the slow, pokey thing I took it to be. Ah, there is a communion to be held with these deaf-mutes of Nature, after all! If you don't believe it, just run a race down some hilly highway, with the fence within reach of

your long whip, and all the wayside bushes nodding their heads and clapping their hands and catching at your carriage-wheels the whole way, as if to clog your pace to let the fence get ahead of you, as it invariably does.

An ancient high-road comes to mind, and I see beside it

> "A homestead among the farms,
> And a woman with bare arms
> Drawing water from a well;
> As the bucket mounts apace,
> With it mounts her own fair face
> As at some magician's spell."

How brilliantly white this old road is, so long burnished in the sun! How refreshing the bloom that hedges it in with dark-leaved orchards on either side, with their soft, suggestive pictures, wandering up over the hills into the mid-day sunlight, and down the sides of the valleys into their cooling shade, sweet with the perfume of the woodlands and noisy with the singing, jubilant music of the brooks.

The old house sits well down in the hollow of the fields, making a pretty picture with its clustered, rambling, sleepy roofs, while overlooking them are the sun-blackened gables of the barns, with troops of swallows to keep them summer company. This country dwelling is painted white, and, with its dark green blinds, it is perfect in its

suggestion of country comfort and thrift. Doors and windows are thrown wide-open to the sun and wind. A part of the ell is protected by low shed-roof, under which is the long well-room, and beside the door opening into this coolest place about the house in midsummer is the huge red cheese-tub set out to dry, and over its rim is thrown the amber-colored cheese-cloth. A long row of glistening milk-pans keeps them company, and across their glimmering line of light leans the slender shadow of the crooked clothes-pole, black and homely enough, but that is full of golden speech and suggestion. Within the shadow of the wide-thrown doors of the woodshed, in its coolest corner, under the rickety stairs that lead by an easy flight to the corn-chamber, — and a famous old chamber it was, — stands the mouldy, open cheese-press, which had a great fascination for me; and I have a faint idea if some one should in after years remove this old press from its deep shadow under the stairs, there might be found many a rusty hint and relic of "whittling days," for hereabouts has disappeared many a youthful treasure, or, in other words, many a jack-knife. I hear the creaking of its long, wooden arm as the housewife piles stone after stone into the basket that hangs by a stout chain from its outer end. What rills of appetizing whey trickle down the side of its broad, open hoop as the

wooden lever bears harder upon its fulcrum of fresh curd, and what a tinkling song it sings at first, to lose that song, only too soon, in a slow drip-drip, as the curd is squeezed drier and more dry in this making of the cheese!

Down the slope that flanks the door of the house, a hoodless but quaint specimen of carpentry in these days, a rounded dome of rifted fire-wood stretches itself, thistle-girt, toward the road; and beyond this helter-skelter woodpile is the ancient half-wall that runs up to the bee-hives, that lie in the shadow of the pomegranate-trees, where the toilers among the field-blossoms live. What suggestions of homely comfort, of open, ruddy fireplaces and leaping flame — of farmer's cheer and generous hospitality! what springs of summer sunshine are here, and what pent-up woodland song! This woodpile is the summer residence of a large and increasing Chickaree family. It is to them a house of wood, in truth, cool and dry; and many a sharp whistle of inquiry or alarm greets the farmer's buxom wife, as she comes hither to gather the sun-dried chips in her broad apron, for the kindling of her kitchen fires. The robins perch every morning upon the topmost peak of the chickaree's home, to tell the already stirring chickarees that the sun is up; and who, once awake, play at hide-and-seek with the house-cat all day long. Within the lights and shifting

shadows of this heaped-up woodpile, the evidence of rustic husbandry, is hid the romance of a summer day at the pleasantest of inland farms, and the rarer dream of long, fire-lighted winter nights by the farm-house hearth-stone.

Just around the corner of the prim front-yard, with its likewise prim picket-fence, painted spotless white, its green drapery of luxuriant woodbine, and hedge of damask roses, the petals of which strew the grass with hints of rare, delicate color, is the narrow cow-lane, with its barrier of three slender bars; and between the tall hemlock posts, the narrow gate adjoining, that is always held in place by its wooden pin, and that opens into the roadside with a quick, uneven lurch, like that of a drunken man; and just beyond, northward, is the aged watering-shed, built long before I can remember, beside the pasture-wall; and where the cattle came at mid-afternoon to drink and loaf, as only cattle can, on long summer days.

The roadside is pink with the daintily tufted blossoms of that pest of the farm, the Corn or Canada Thistle. The tall, slender stalks, guarded by countless bristling spines, that are not less capable of inflicting a painful wound because they are so insignificantly small, tower above all others of the weed-family, and stand alone by themselves. The thistle is the tramp of field and wayside, the vagrant of hay-mow and cattle-crib, and the

scourge of garden-patch; it is the bane of whatever of decent vegetable company it gets into; its shadow is the upas-taint of the farm; without a single redeeming quality, it is abhorred and anathematized by booted farmer and barefooted boy alike. What festerings and burnings come with the prick of its tiny, almost invisible needle, as much to be dreaded almost as the sting of a bee! Once under the surface of the cuticle, its microscopic lance eludes all search; and with a pain that, slight as it is, is indescribably provoking, as if it were telling you, with every bite and stinging itch, — "Find me if you can," — at its game of hide-and-seek among the shrinking, quivering nerves. When its bloom has faded out under the amorous heats of midsummer, and its seeds have ripened, the transformation has taken place; and this glowing, sweetly scented weed-flower is a mass of downy, milk-white, winged seeds that, held within a calyx beautifully clad in a green armor of lozenge-shaped scales, look like a bunch of floss, with the upright end squarely trimmed, or, rather, like a silken-tipped pompon.

These seeds of the thistle are of ethereal lightness, and the summer winds sow them with bountiful hand here, there, and everywhere; over the mowing-fields, by the roadside, under the hedges, through the pastures, and over the topmost spires of the woods, flying as the birds do, and alighting

only when the winds have tired of them. This seed is one of Nature's wonders, with thousands of other seeds lying dormant within its glistening ovule; sailing over the widest ponds, and climbing the highest mountains, and keeping fellowship with the clouds, for all I know. One might justly think these winged weed-seeds would never stop in their airy flight, but, sown somewhere, another year they peep from the brown earth, and, coaxed alternately by sun and rain, they soon overtop their slower neighbors, to fade away again with another midsummer, to again sow the farm-lands and by-ways with the germs of a newer generation of baleful weeds, as countless in numbers as the sands of the sea-shore. The thistle may do for the Scotsman's guerdon, but the New England farmer banishes it, pink blossoms, sweet perfume, poetry, and all, to the merciless scythe and hoe, as the Scotsman would, did he have to wring his substance from a New England soil, which is of no mean quality, rugged as it is.

Here are thistle-birds by the score, flying over the tops of this huge bed of thistles, not a whit more yellow than the yellow butterflies that alight here and there among the pink bloom that overtops the low wall, the runway for all the striped squirrels or chickarees in this immediate region; and, as well, the holing-place for more than one woodchuck family, as the yellow house-dog would

tell you, could you translate his bark of exasperation, half smothered as it is in the dirt that marks his unavailing effort to dig "Chucky" from his hiding under the great half-buried stones. I can hear the swift, angry chattering of the woodchuck as the dog gets nearer his victim, the prolonged, angrier growl of the dog as the game nears the end; a moment of silence, and then a fierce commotion in the bushes, as if something was getting the liveliest sort of a shaking, intermixed with growlings and chatterings; but it is only for a moment, and the unequal combat is ended, and Towser trots out into the road, with the limp, lifeless woodchuck in his mouth, to drop his prize at my feet, a single episode of a summer day.

The yellow, or, to be more ornithologically exact, the thistle-bird, makes his summer habitat here in northern New England, among the scrub apple-trees and witch-hazels, — the hamamelis of the drug-vender, — by the roadside, building his nest, which is beautifully woven out of the snow-white shreds of bark gleaned from the neighboring birches, lining it with the softest of mosses from the pines in the adjoining swamp. Why these rivals of the canary, in color and shape, should be afflicted with such an ill-omened, plebeian name, I never could surmise, for this wayside dweller is a beauty, lissome and dainty in his get-up, of fine plumage, and possessed of a pleas-

ing song, a low-voiced warble, not unlike, in some respects, the less ambitious notes of his imported Dromio, the singer of the Hartz Mountains. This fellow, hopping along the fences or along the top stones of the stone walls or along its top-rails, is excellent company. Sometimes he is whimsical, and prefers the slender, topmost twigs of the bushes, flying from one to the other, as if it were a matter of supreme delight to teter down and up, if only for a brief moment, on the cone-shaped minarets of the pink and white blossoms of the hardhack bushes; and what a picture of lightsome grace and color he makes against the background of June! I have noticed that some of our bird neighbors show a positive liking for humanity, as others exhibit a marked avoidance. I do not think this aversion to humanity arises from fear of harm, but rather because some of the feathered family are in some sort of the "hail, fellow, well met" disposition, while others are more exclusive and aristocratic in the choice of their associates, a choice sometimes more nice than wise.

Some people seem to get on with the birds better than others. There may be something of instinct in that. The thrush family prefer the lowlands and deep woodland shadows, unless it may be the red thrush, that one sees so much by the roadside, where there are plenty of vagrant

pines in which they may hide; and even the orchard-dweller, the noisy, red-breasted robin, has something of this trait of shyness that one cannot fail to notice in every movement of his cousin, who builds his red-thrush nest within the shadows of the roadside pines. As deep brownish red as is the plumage of this feathered fellow who makes the pines his habitat, while robin lives across the road in the orchard, his flight through the sunlit atmosphere is a revelation. It is, in its way, almost as brilliant as the flight of the oriole, only more fiery; but in its swiftness like a missile propelled by some extraordinary force. It is more a suggestion of hot color than anything else that occurs to my mind, for it is a well trained eye that is able to follow this bird's silent going and coming among the trees, for he is rarely without their shelter. Better known as the brown thrasher, he is one of the great favorites about the farm, not only for the company and delightful song he affords, but for the industry he exhibits in the farmer's behalf, in garden and orchard. It is about the middle of May that one hears the thrasher's song, known in some localities as the song of the Brown Mocker, that is so hard to describe and so delightful to listen to, in the early spring morning, and which Samuels sums up as a "confused mixture of the notes of different birds, or rather seems to be." You will find its nest, if you are fortunate

enough to discover it, on the ground, among the thick grasses, and, most like, under the shelter of a clump of bushes, or even higher up in a thicket or tangle of vines and briers, and sometimes, but not often, it is a bush-dweller, building high up among the limbs and branches of thorn or other dwarf grower, in the openings of pasture along the edges of the woods. Wilson's description of this bird and its ways is so interesting that it is not out of place here. He says, — "It is the largest of all our Thrushes, and is a well known and very distinguished songster. About the middle or 20th of April, or generally about the time the cherry-trees begin to blossom, he arrives in Pennsylvania; and from the tops of our hedge-rows, sassafras, apple or cherry-trees, he salutes the opening morning with his charming song, which is loud, emphatical, and full of variety. At that serene hour, you may plainly distinguish his voice fully a half a mile off. These notes are not imitative, as his name would seem to import, and as some people believe, but seem wholly his own, and have considerable resemblance to the notes of the Song Thrush (*Turdus Musicus*) of Great Britain. Early in May he builds his nest, choosing a thorn-bush, low cedar, thicket of briers, dog-wood sapling, or cluster of vines, for its situation, generally within a few feet of the ground. Outwardly it is constructed of small sticks; then layers of

dry leaves; and lastly, lined with fine, fibrous roots, but without any plaster. The eggs are five, thickly sprinkled with ferruginous grains, on a very pale bluish ground. They generally have two broods in a season. Like all birds that build near the ground, he shows great anxiety for the safety of his nest and young, and often attacks the black snake in their defence; generally, too, with success, his strength being greater, and his bill stronger and more powerful than any other of his tribe within the United States. His food consists of worms, which he scratches from the ground, caterpillars, and many kinds of insects. Beetles, and the whole race of coleopterous insects, wherever he can meet with them, are sure to suffer. He is accused, by some people, of scratching up the hills of Indian corn in planting-time. This may be partly true; but for every grain he pilfers, I am persuaded, he destroys five hundred insects, particularly a large, dirty-colored grub, with a black head, which is more pernicious to the corn and other grain and vegetables than nine-tenths of the whole feathered race. He is an active, vigorous bird, flies generally low, from one thicket to another, with his long, broad tail spread out like a fan, is often seen about brier and bramble bushes, along fences, and has a single note or chuck as you approach his nest. In Pennsylvania they are numerous, but never fly in

flocks. About the middle of September, or as soon as they have well recovered from their moulting, in which they suffer severely, they disappear for a season. In passing through the southern parts of Virginia, and south as far as Georgia, in the depth of winter, I have found them lingering in sheltered situations, particularly on the border of swamps and rivers. On the first of March they were in full song round the commons at Savannah, as if straining to outstrip the mocking-bird, that prince of feathered musicians."

"The Thrasher is a welcome visitant in spring to every lover of rural scenery and rural song. In the months of April and May, when our woods, hedge-rows, orchards, and cherry-trees are one profusion of blossoms; when every object around conveys the sweet sensations of joy, and Heaven's abundance is, as it were, showering around us, the grateful heart beats in unison with the varying elevated strains of this excellent bird; we listen to its notes with a kind of devotional ecstasy, as a morning hymn to the great and most adorable Creator of all. The human being who, amidst such scenes, and in such seasons of rural serenity and delight, can pass them with cold indifference, and even contempt, I sincerely pity; for abject must that heart be, and callous those feelings, and depraved that taste, which neither the charms of

nature, nor the melody of innocence, nor the voice of gratitude or devotion can reach."

"Concerning the sagacity and reasoning faculty of this bird, my venerable friend, Mr. Bartram, writes me as follows: 'I remember to have reared one of these birds from the nest, which, when full-grown became very tame and docile. I frequently let him out of his cage, to give him a taste of liberty. After fluttering, and dusting himself in dry sand and earth, and bathing, washing, and dressing himself, he would proceed to hunt insects, such as beetles, crickets, and other shelly tribes; but, being very fond of wasps, after catching them and knocking them about to break their wings, he would lay them down, then examine if they had a sting, and with his bill squeeze the abdomen to clear it of the reservoir of poison before he would swallow his prey.'"

The nest, newly built, I have never found in Maine woods or pastures earlier than the last of May. They are deeply built affairs, a combination of twigs and strips torn into strings, of the cedar or birch, and lined with combings from the tails of the cattle they have gleaned from here and there among the pasture brambles or lowland bushes. The largest number of eggs I have yet discovered in a single nest was four, which were something over an inch in length, ovate in form, with a diameter in their thickest part but little

less than their length, in color a greenish or dusty white spattered with the tiniest of spots of warm brown. By the first of October this beautiful visitor is away to the South.

Robin Red-breast is not so shy as is this swift-winged frequenter of the country roads; but he seems always looking over his shoulder, as if he suspected some one was about to play a trick upon him. Ah, Robin, how many times when a boy did I try to get a pinch of salt on your tail-feathers, as if you would let me do such a foolish thing; and yet I believed it possible, because an older person had told me I might possibly succeed. It was like many another boyish dream, as unreal as Castles in Spain. The smaller bird-folk who haunt the highway and door-yard elms and the eaves of the barns, the orioles, the sparrows, the thistle-birds, the swallows, the wrens, and blue-birds, and all those which Wilson Flagg termed as "Birds of the Garden and Orchard," seem rather to enjoy the semblance of protection which their proximity to humanity would guarantee in some sort. No doubt, they think themselves better out of the way of the owls and hawks, and they are partially right. It is only the butcher-bird, the bloodthirsty shrike, that makes its onslaught among these feathered people in the latter part of the summer, impaling its booty upon the slender needles of the thorn bushes, two or

three at a time, and seemingly out of a pure wantonness.

The jay is a nest-despoiler, but rarely approaches the farm-house; the remote fields and the shadowy woodlands are his hunting-grounds, as they are those of the broad-winged, the smaller, sharp-shinned, the sparrow and pigeon hawks; but the crows and squirrels go bird-nesting as well, and the blue-winged robber finds his own nest despoiled in turn, which is one of Nature's compensations. Nature's laws are compensatory; it is only in this way that she maintains her superabundance of life. In other words, Nature has a system of book-keeping as novel as it is accurate, but it is always an off-set account. Debit and credit, as men understand the terms, mean nothing to her. Fluctuations in market values or the rising or falling fortunes of men have no influence to change her seasons of drought, her drenching fogs, her floods, her long winters and deep snows or scorching heats of summer. Nature never gets askew, but her balance-sheets are rarely ever made up. Her plus and minus signs are interchangeable, and her equations worked carefully out to solution prove her unknown quantities to be surprisingly large as they are less frequently surprisingly small. Her array of facts is never disappointing. Few or many, they every one tell the same truth, — that Nature is the handmaid of her Creator.

Indoor people do not know a tithe of the wonderful things that may be found in the pastures and woods, their never-ending delights, their odorous breathings full of ozone and tonic quality. What streets like the fern-embroidered avenues of the woodlands! what architecture like that with which Nature lines their shadowy vistas! Here are the teachings of a century and of infinite variety and interest. No wonder the grown-up boy sighs for the freshness and wild, unrestrained life of the lush grasses of the June fields and the breezy outlooks of the hill-sides, the soft whisperings of the trees and the chatter of the people who live within their sheltering shadows. The slender fingers of the bushes brush our garments as we go past them with a friendly touch, and nod their obeisance as they swing back into their accustomed places with a deft grace. There is a fellowship in the communion of the human worshipper among the woods and tangled grasses; the overhanging arms of the gray beeches, the maples, and pines reach out toward the wayfarer along their leaf-carpeted hallways, as if they had the inexpressible desire to take him into their fullest confidence, a fellowship hardly known to the faith-impelled communicant bowing at the decorated altars of the churches of men's building. Here is inspiration, and here are the feasting tables of the poet. If ever one feels great

truths, it is when they are all about him; and if he tells them as he sees them, he is a poet in truth, for he cannot be otherwise.

Some one has said that "trees have the divine gift of silence;" so have the outlying fields and hills. Everything one sees in nature is like the raised type in the books that are made for the blind. We read by feeling as well as by sight; and it is to me one of the rarest ways to interpret the profoundest of Nature's teachings. It is the subtile touch, as it is the alert and keenly expectant ear and eye, that reveals the richest parts of the plot to which Nature's serial is written; but Nature never gratifies people who grope among her mysteries without a definite purpose. Nature has ever a smile and nod of appreciation for the searcher whose heart lends fuel to his pursuit.

II.

SCARCELY a rod from this sagging gate is the old roadside watering-shed, its north end and easterly side clad in a single suit of hemlock, full of chinks and rents, each one a whispering-tube for the winds all the year round, and on its southerly aspect, the side to the highway, is the pine dug-out trough, rarely frescoed in various shades of green, and reaching from one end to the other of the shed. From it a narrow, wooden

spout runs down through a triangular crevice in the wall, with its maple top-rail over all, to the half-hogshead in the roadside that serves the traveller's horse at all hours of the day. The iron hoops that hold its black staves together are covered thick with a ruddy coat of rust and oxydized markings of bright yellow that present countless facets to the sun. This watering-tub sits a bit uneven upon its foundation of moss-covered rock, and down one side trickles a broad, silver ribbon of glistening water from the overbrimming surface above. Within its sparkling rim I see a wonderful picture as one would in a camera obscura, and I think of those lines of Emerson's: —

> "Thou canst not wave thy staff in air,
> Or dip thy paddle in the lake,
> But it carves a bow of beauty there,
> And the ripples in rhymes our oars forsake."

I hear the rhymes of this overbrimming wayside watering-place, and it makes a rare song, as I hear all the sounds that live about it.

A picture is like life — it is never finished; so these landscapes grow upon me the farther away I get from them. Like a canvas that gets beauty from the mellowing effects of long years, so the pictures within the narrow periphery of this old green moss-fringed tub take an added beauty because enriched by the love I bear them. The

beauty of living does not lie so much in what one goes to as in what comes to one. Suggestions often stand for more than the realities behind them, that bring with them too sharpened, too angular an outline. The brain is peopled with hosts of ripened reflections and mellowed memories, the pleasures of which keep pace with the added years, coming to one in the quiet of the night as in the song-tide of breaking day. Across and above the long pine trough, just within reach of my boyish arms, ran one of the stout, axe-hewn girders of this weather-stained structure, where the robins were flying out and in through the whole of the breeding-season, to one day have their secret nesting-place discovered. The nest of the robin is one of the orchard pictures. The wide limbs and sharply angular outline of the apple-tree, and the coarsely but compactly built nests of this plebeian among bird kind, are in perfect consonance, but atop of the hemlock cross-beam in this old wayside resort in hot weather was a favorite building-place for this slack-fingered fellow, whose notes and cheery ways made him doubly welcome. Many a time have I tip-toed up over the wobbly top-stones in the wall that ran by the front of the shed, to stand on the edge of the brimming trough, and with craned neck peered into the nest to count its three greenish blue eggs, that one day were by some

sort of magic changed into a trio of hairy birdlings, whose yellow bills upthrust would open wide at the lightest sound. How hungry those open mouths always seemed! Under the shed rafters, the mother hugged the shadow of her perilous perch in silence, and I sometimes thought I could see her heart throb with apprehension, as if we boys were heartless robbers of bird-nests. But we never troubled the fledglings except to put a few angle-worms into their waiting mouths for their delectation. After a few visits of my own, the mother-bird became reconciled and did not mind them, for she would rarely go more than a yard or so away, but one morning old and young were all gone to the orchard across the swale, which, after midsummer, was the rendezvous for the robin family until they began their migratory journey southward.

There was always a pool of water in the highway, where a numerous butterfly family held high carnival in the sunshine, hovering over the water as if to catch reflections of the gaudy color of banded and spotted wing in its mirroring surface, or alighting along the crests of the ruts in the mud with these self-same wings folded tremulously above their backs. This must be one of their drinking-places. New England is rich in its beautiful butterfly family. According to Mr. Maynard, there are over a hundred distinct species of these

winged flowers of the ground-atmosphere, making their home in the woodland shadows as in the broad sunshine of the fields.

These Lepidoptera are day-flyers that, when at rest, carry their wings erect and folded against each other. The butterfly is noted for its remarkable and eccentric markings, its brilliant colors and wonderfully drawn lines, as delicately painted as if with the finest of camel's-hair brushes and the rarest of pigments. What beauty lies within the scalloped edges of brilliant color upon its outspread wings! These little fellows of the highway-puddles and watering-places, in their coats of lemon-yellow, are beautiful indeed; but far beyond them is the royal garb of the swallow-tail. The swallow-tail butterfly is indeed magnificent, being found in perfection through the entire summer. The peacock is the smaller, but not less splendid, with its markings of brownish or yellowish buff, its purple-reds and pale blue spots, and its triangular patches of more sober color. The larger butterflies are noted for their strong, swift flight. This is especially true of the large milk-weed butterfly, that one sees about the meadows and fields in July. Where there is an abundance of milk-weed flowers, there you will see this fellow poking his clubbed antennæ unsuspiciously into the hidden sweets that are stored within these blossoms. This butterfly deposits its eggs upon

the leaves of this weed, and in about fourteen days the larvæ have matured, and within which time they have moulted thrice. After an interval of ten days, the pupa-life is done, during which it is suspended from the extremity of the pupal abdomen, when the perfect insect is freed from the thin walls of its temporary prison, to go flying up and down among the milk-weed blossoms with the rest of its kin.

The white-banded and blue-banded butterflies are remarkable for the variety and brilliancy of their coloring and their beautiful markings. I have often wished I might find Nature's dye-pots, out of which these beautiful creatures filched their royal hues; notably, the Red Admiral, the Hunter's, and the Thistle, as they are called by those who know them best. Of mountain, barren-ground, woodland, and meadow species, the habitats of this numerous winged family, silver-spotted, and clad in suitings of blue, scarlet, grass-green, orange, purple, and black, and all the drabs and browns in the market, the butterflies that live in the woods are the most delicately marked and wonderfully beautiful. One only needs to give these blossoms of the air slight attention, to find it growing into a marked curiosity and interest. If you will make the effort to capture one of these vigorous flyers, you will be so fascinated with the color and make of his coat that you will find yourself making a butterfly

fashion-plate of your own, by catching every one that comes within your reach; and you will be carrying them home, and pinning them to the draperies about your fireplace mantel, to admire and study at your leisure.

Across the road was the frog-pond; a broad-faced pool of stagnant water in the spring and fall, where, when an urchin, I had skated on many a Thanksgiving day, with hosts of rustling bulrush lances painted grayish-brown by the early frosts, and standing erect in their miniature field of ice, and the bleak November winds for company. But in summer the sun drank it dry, and only the pale green sediment of its slimy bottom, thoroughly baked in the heat of August, was upturned to the sky. The melting snows and heavy spring rains filled it to the brim with roily water, that was, until long into June, the Paradise of the frog family. In this latter month its waters were green with slime and thick with frog-spawn, numberless clusters of jelly-like substance, each one full of tiny spots, eggs, embryo tadpoles. These eggs, that are about as large as an onion-seed, and that finally grow into tadpoles, are impregnated as soon as they are deposited in the water. During the passage of the eggs through the oviduct of the female, they become enveloped in a gelatinous sac, which increases to the size of a small orange in the water, and which is so light

that it serves as a float, so the spawn may float with the ripples of the stream, if Nature so ordains; it being, as well, simply an ingenious provision of Nature to protect the eggs from untoward changes in the atmosphere. We boys knew it only as frog-spawn; but when the egg is hatched, it serves as food for the newly born tadpole. The first frog is hardly anything like a frog at all; he is rather an animate incongruity, with hardly any head, and a great deal of tail, which serves this orphan of the swamps as a means of locomotion. One by one these clusters of jelly-like substance fall apart and disappear; and in their stead come thousands of black, misshapen objects, with blunt heads and long tails darting hither and thither, with many a graceful wiggling of this tapering rudder, and which, at the same time, serves as a fin. A few days more, and they have grown tiny arms or fore-legs; and still later, the tails have grown short and stubby, to disappear entirely; and by the metamorphosis have come hosts of froglets, that, as this diminutive pond gets lower, depart for the swamps and moist grasses in the swale, at the further side of the kitchen-garden; so the black spot of this greenish-hued amber-colored jelly is become the diminutive toad we find in the pastures, on late June afternoons, by the roadside, and in the gardens. But oftentimes they are not so plenty, for I have seen

many a day, when on a pickerel jaunt, that a handful of frogs would have been a treasure.

Dr. Hill says there are ten varieties of the toad in the United States. The tongue of a toad is different from that of other animals, with its roots where the tip of its tongue should be, and the tip of its tongue where its roots should be; it is one of the peculiarities of this little fellow which makes a minute description of himself and his habits interesting. Watch the toad run out his tongue, so long and slender and thin that he has no occasion to swallow. When a child, I used to catch my toad; and then, as many another boy has done, with a dangling string, and a bit of bread-crust tied to it, well smeared with molasses to attract the flies, I would hold it before his toadship's mouth; and it was rare fun to see him thrust his tongue outward with the rapidity of a lightning-flash almost, a tongue as rakish-looking as can be imagined, to catch every fly that alighted upon the simple lure. One does not see many toads about after October has gone, though I have found them under boards and bits of old lumber, by the roadside, after the ground has been closed by the frost; they do not go into the deeps of the muck-beds, as has been popularly supposed, but adopt any shelter that seems most handy. One is as likely to find them hibernating under stones, and in the hollows of decayed trees and stumps, as

elsewhere. When the frost is out of the ground in the spring, about the last of April to the first of May, in the most northern and eastern of the New England States, the trill of the toad awakens the silence of the swamp into a tremulo of sound. Toads are great gadders. Put a dozen of them in your garden or flower-bed over night, and by morning they will have become the subject of a mysterious disappearance, for not the slightest sign of a single one of them is about. Like the acrobats they are, they have jumped all the barriers of your inclosure in the uneasy life they follow.

What a noisy place was this pool at sundown of the warm spring days, and what shrill pipings came up through the warm mists that lay like an immense coverlet over the pasture hollows, and that with silent footstep stole up to the very barn-yard, up through the narrow cow-lane, and into the farm-house door-yard! What a melody of frog-notes smote the ear of Night, with the new moon hanging just above the tops of the pines, and the whippoorwill whistling from the lowland maples! When I think of the new moon, just dipping into the warm haze on the western hills, as I used to see it in those days, there comes to mind the care I always had to see the new moon first over my right shoulder, "for luck;" and, I am afraid, even nowadays there is a trace of the old superstition hanging about me, for I never fail,

with my first glimpse of the new moon in the west, to query over which shoulder I have seen it, — one of the rustic ear-marks which the grown-up man carries with him, to emphasize the fact of his once having been a country boy.

There is something else the new moon brings to mind, for I remember Owen Meredith's beautiful fable of the Windmill paying court to the Water-mill : —

"One summer morning, Father Jove
Created the Windmill, wanting a fan
To cool his palace Olympian;
And forbade the celestial bird to move
From the perch assign'd him by Jove's high will.
But alas for the Windmill! he fell in love,
Madly in love, with the Water-mill,
Who then dwelt upon earth. And one dark night,
'Jove will never find me out,' thought he,
As earthward slyly he winged his flight
To visit the Water-mill; where she,
Like a maiden demure, was sitting beside
Her spinning-wheel. Doth she mourn for him?
For he, having chosen (not to be spied)
A night when the Moon was wrapped up to the rim,
And seeing her not as he passed on the sly,
Broke one of her horns with a flap of his wing.
The Moon to Jove complain'd, and thereby
All the gods got a gust of the thing,
And the Windmill was banished to earth, but still
Far away from the Water-mill.
That is the reason he looks so sad.
And the Moon keeps turning her face in heaven,
To hide the scar which that night she had
From the Windmill's wing."

Overlooking the frog-pond was a knoll, where for years the parsnips, beets, carrots and turnips and onions grew upon a patch of rich brown earth, hedged in with a tall fence of rough hemlock-boards, as ancient, almost, as the garden itself, and that were of a lightish green tinge, so thickly overgrown with lichens and so deeply fringed with moss were they. And here was a huge bed of lovage, with its beautiful, light-colored foliage, and close by it was a bed of stunted sage, possessed of a charming fragrance, and towering above were the abundant and graceful white umbels of the caraway-plant to keep it company. On the further side of the garden was a thickly matted hedge of currant-bushes, that every August were crimson with sour fruit. This was the ancient garden-patch of the farm, cultivated from time immemorial, and that paid its master with wholesome returns of early potatoes and succulent green peas without stint.

Within the secret recesses of this grass-choked hedge the sparrows built them dainty nests of woven hair, and notably a frolicsome bobolink came here with his soberly dressed wife to live, and a merry songster this feathered husband was! I always watched for his coming about the first of June; and he is very tame and familiar, once in his New England haunts. If he does not open his mouth, you cannot help knowing him as he

greets you some early summer morning from the tallest post in the old garden-fence, in his trim suit of black, with a patch of brownish cream color on the back of his neck, his snow-white rump and his outer primaries tipped with yellow, for he is the most grotesque-behaving fellow that ever flew. Just the other side of the swale, where the sweet-flag or calamus-root grew in abundance, on its farther rim, was the big orchard that has stood here ever since these lands were cleared.

But of the swale or swamp lovers there is rarely a more beautiful flower than that of the Blue Flag. What brilliancy of color does it possess! Almost as varied as the rainbow are its hues, and it is well named *versi-color*. Longfellow calls it a "beautiful lily," and sings of it as beautifully: —

"Beautiful Lily, dwelling by still rivers,
Or solitary mere,
Or where the sluggish meadow-brook delivers
Its waters to the weir,

"Thou laughest at the mill, the whir and worry
Of spindle and of loom,
And the great wheel that toils amid the hurry
And rushing of the flume,

"Born to the purple, born to joy and pleasance,
Thou dost not toil nor spin,
But makest glad and radiant with thy presence
The meadow and the lin.

"The wind blows and uplifts thy drooping banner,
And round thee throng and run
The rushes, the green yeomen of thy manor,
The outlaws of the sun.

"The burnished dragon-fly is thy attendant,
And tilts against the field,
And down the listed sunbeam rides resplendent
With steel-blue mail and shield."

Its blossom comes with the Bobolink, and oftentimes the swamps and swales are fairly carpeted with its glories. Six-petalled, three broad blades drooping downward, and a verticil of three smaller petals curving upward from its centre, with a rare grace, make the flower that wins admiration from all who appreciate the beautiful in Nature.

Under the shade of the old Russia apple-tree is a group of the orchid family, the Snake-mouth, its dainty, pink flower nodding with every wind that blows up the run. Here is one of Nature's specimens of beautiful coloring; the consummate dyer of the field-blossoms has here done a master-bit of color-mixing, in this blush that mantles the petals of the humble Snake-mouth. The Bog Arum and Indian Cucumber are here in abundance; and, as well, the stout stalks and broad, dark green leaves of the Indian Poke, that is ever fresh and vigorous in the severest of drought; and on the lesser knolls and crests of the uneven places in the swale, numberless ferns of the Polypody family keep the Blue

Flag company; while along the wall by the highway, the Swamp Rose flaunts its scant but richly perfumed petals above them all. This swale, that owns its swift-running brook in the spring-time, that irons down the rank grasses as it flows pastureward with its rushing current, is dry by midsummer. What royal deeps of feathery-topped blue-joint waited here for the coming of the mower, and what aromatic odors filled the air as the scythe crept through the spiky leaves or flattened rushes of the calamus-root, the favorite of schoolboy days! How well I remember the rough, fimbriated, queerly shaped root of this groveller in the swale-mud; and how often with my jack-knife have I cut the fimbriate bonds that held it to its bed of black soil, to wash it in the clear water of this self-same watering-trough! Within the shadow of the wide-sprawling limbs of this old-time Russia tree, the fruit of which had the true Cossack quality of rough rind and a pulp that might have been taken for a ball of sole-leather, — for it was as dry and tasteless as ever an apple could be, — the calamus grew rankest and most abundant; but about it lurked a guardian dragon, that was no less than the poison-ivy, for which I had a most wholesome dread in swale or hay-mow. Be that as it may, the swale was a favorite playground, with its rushing brook in spring-time, its summer blossoms, and autumn fruitage.

III.

Up the slope was a huge fruit-bearer, dubbed the Spurr Apple, the tallest in the whole orchard; in fact, it was the tallest, largest apple-tree I had ever seen, and on its topmost spire Rob of Lincoln would sway back and forth in the wind, nodding his head to one side and the other, pouring out his choicest love-songs, until the very tips of his wings were aquiver with unrestrained ecstasy; and where, as Samuels says, he would rattle out "the most curious, incomprehensible, jingling, roundabout, careless, joyous, laughable medley that any bird-throat ever uttered." The arrival of the male birds precedes that of the females by a few days. When they have once made their appearance, the mating and love-making begin, when the air is filled with song and contention among these feathered suitors; the air throbs with the rivalry of their music, but the early days of June are hardly over, and the mating is accomplished. The nest is built in some secret place in field or orchard, and the world is regaled with swelling floods of melody the whole day long. I have translated one of these songs; or, rather, I have tried to say what it seemed this

harum-scarum songster was trying to say to Mistress Bobolink. A song without music it may seem here, but I carry the music in my heart. O, Robert of Lincoln, I hear you now, and I am bewitched with your melody, as I was years ago, a barefooted urchin among the orchard-trees!

Bobolink! bobolink! I say,
Bobolink!
Kir-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-chk, chk!
Chee, chee, chee!
Here you! here you! See, see, see
Ah! Dear Mistress Bobolink,
I love you so, I love you so,
Only your heart and mine may know
A life so fair, so rarely sweet,
The perfectness of life below,
Growing more beautiful, more complete
With every day like as a Rose
In wealth of fragrant, petalled bloom
With every summer wind that blows—
I love you so, I love you so,
Dear Mistress Bobolink.
Chink!

Kir-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r, che-che!
Bobolink! bobolink! See-see-see!
Kur-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-chk!
Chee—e! che—e! — chee-chee!
Chink!
Never such happiness hath been
To bird-folk; never were wrought such days
Within the golden looms of June;
Never such web of wingèd ways,
In whose deft weaving to and fro

June's shuttle swiftly flew, nor wound
With woof of vague distrust and care,
But rare content with summer's round —
Never such happiness hath been.
Do you hear? Do you hear?
What I say, say, say?
Bobolink-link-link!

Think! thank! think! What do you think
Dear Mistress Bobolink?
Kr-r-r-chk! Che—e! che—e!
Chink!
But love and summer have an end;
Never the life so richly blest
Without some jealous thought inwrought
To mar its peace with some unrest.
Never a rose without its thorn,
Yet heart to heart, we have no fear
Of loss, or stinging speech of pain.
Content are we while love is here,
Though Love and Summer have an end.
That's what I think, think, think,
Mrs. Bobolink! I say!
Kir-r-r-r, Che—e! che—e!
Chink!

Bobolink's song, as Wilson Flagg says, is "overflowing with rapturous admiration" for his bird-spouse. He begins his love-song from this tallest apple-tree, or mayhap from one of the hemlock-posts in the garden-fence, and then starts off with a swift flight through the sunshine, to where his mate is hiding in the hedge, and, hovering a moment with balancing wings in mid-air, he pours out a flood of swift, brilliant notes in recita-

tive, with every part of his song as droll and ludicrous and as full of irrepressible mirth and jollity as if it were a part in some rare good comic opera. He is an unrivalled singer, and is at his best when the afternoon is well over, singing the sun down out of sight oftentimes. His last strain has hardly died away when the robin tunes his whistle in the door-yard maples, and the lowland singers are filling the meadows with sweet echoes. This is the reverse of his morning performance, as the bobolink rarely begins his morning song until the sun is up, when the robin has whistled his throat dry, and when Robert of Lincoln has the whole out-door world to himself. It is a wonderful exhibition. Bobolink never has the "blues," at least he never betrays the least sign of mental despondency in his voice, that is ever at concert-pitch, and he executes his arias without a single false note in the whole performance.

I am lying stretched out in the lush honeysuckle under the Spurr apple-tree, with face turned skyward, and Robert of Lincoln's notes come pattering down through the dark green leaves overhead into the grass beside me. How fast they come, like rain-drops in April! How the June winds blow! I wonder where the winds come from; so I wonder where the bobolink gets his rollicking song. I have thought they both came from the heart of Nature, so akin are they to each other.

Mrs. O'Lincoln is a lady of exceedingly "modest appearance," and very much of a stay-at-home body, while O'Lincoln himself is a very pattern of conjugal fidelity. His nest, built in the grassy tussocks, holds from four to five eggs, of varying color, of the tint of ultramarine ash, covered with spots of very dark brown or dusky clay color. When the O'Lincoln children are out of the shell this orchard-singer grows silent. Family cares weigh more and more heavy upon him, and he is more assiduous in his attention to his young, scouring the fields for insects the whole day through. The mowing-field is his favorite haunt, and many a nest have I laid open to the sunshine with my scythe in the first days of July. As the summer grows older, O'Lincoln's garb grows sadly rusty; and he has really become a very quiet, respectable-like citizen, and just a bit inclined to a shy sort of pokyness, showing a marked predisposition to corpulency, on his diet of grasshoppers and other field-insects, in these idle days of closing summer. O'Lincoln sets a good table, as his children will tell you, grown almost to their father's size. By the middle of September, he and his family entertain thoughts of moving, and in a few days have begun their southern trip, which they make with varying fortune or misfortune, by reason of the constant fusillade of the shot-gun which greets them the moment they have crossed the border-

line of the Middle and Southern States, where, and thenceforward until their return North, they are the much-sought-for dainties of the bird-epicure.

These orchard-trees were the favorite hunting-grounds of the Downy Woodpecker. On this, the largest apple-tree I ever saw, the Spurr, were thousands of this fellow's gimlet-holes extending up its southerly side, from root to topmost limb. On the swale side was a single dead limb, almost the size of a man's body, and into its under side was cut a hole as large as a good-sized apple, with edges as evenly trimmed as if cut with an auger. Tap the trunk of the tree sharply, and the shapely head of a Flicker or Golden-winged Woodpecker is thrust just a bit out, and two bright eyes are looking down upon you with lively curiosity. In boyhood I knew this fellow as the Yellow Hammer, the most beautiful of the woodpecker family. A sharper rap than before sends this apple-tree dweller out into the sunlight, with swift and exceedingly graceful flight; and it is a long flight, as well, for he rarely stops until he is well out of sight, nor does he return until the intruder upon his domain is well away. He is hardly less shy than the black log-cock of the woodland. As he wings his way across the orchard, his passage is like that of some golden missile; the lightish brown or olivaceous green color that is so attrac-

tive when one catches him at work on his domicile is changed to a flashing golden-brown when he is awing. If let alone, he will return year after year to the same bird-roof, which speaks well for his love of locality. I cannot do better than quote Audubon's charming description of this beautiful bird: —

"Their note is merriment itself, as it imitates a prolonged and jovial laugh, heard at a considerable distance. Several males pursue a female, reach her, and, to prove the force and truth of their love, bow their heads, spread their tails, and move sidewise, backwards, and forwards, performing such antics as might induce any one witnessing them, if not of the most morose temper, to join his laugh to theirs. The female flies to another tree, where she is closely followed by one, two, or even half a dozen of these gay suitors, and where again the same ceremonies are gone through. No fightings occur, no jealousies seem to exist among these beaux, until a marked preference is shown to some individual, when the rejected proceed in search of another female. In this manner, all the Golden-winged Woodpeckers are soon happily mated. Each pair immediately proceed to excavate the trunk of a tree, and finish a hole in it sufficient to contain themselves and their young. They both work with great industry and apparent pleasure. Should the male, for instance,

be employed, the female is close to him, and congratulates him on the removal of every chip which his bill sends through the air. While he rests, he appears to be speaking to her on the most tender subjects, and when fatigued is at once assisted by her. In this manner, by the alternate exertions of each, the hole is dug and finished." Audubon does not say anything about their habit of returning to the same nest year after year, but my own observation proves this, that either the old tree-dwellers came back with the returning summer, or that their nest was occupied by another family. I prefer to believe that my old friend came back to see me every year, for I do not believe he could have selected a better site for his rustic home.

But the Bobolink and the Flicker did not have this old orchard all to themselves by any means, for the timid Song-Sparrow, the Vesper-Sparrow, and the Hair-Bird, the Linnet, and the Peabody-Bird helped to keep the air tremulous and agog with their sweet melody. From morning until night, and often after sundown, this dark-leaved orchard was alive with warble and chirp and trill and twitter that made the most charming of out-door orchestras. They fill the winds with speech, while the wild-flowers fill them with perfume, and so the winds blow on over the fragrant woods, the flower-painted pastures and fields until the day is

blown out; but I am back at the pasture-bars opposite the sagging gate by the roadside.

Within this pasture door-way I can see the halting line of cows as it winds up from the lowland feeding-grounds of the cattle below this old highway. Up come the cattle, wading one by one through the shallow waters of the runlet, where the cobble-stones from the wheat-field on the side-hill have been dumped into its miry bed to make a roadway to the meadow-lands for the odorous blue-joint and cat's-tail grass, and that are just hidden by the black tops of the hemlocks at the farthest edge of the pastures. A small boy is at the heels of the slow-footed herd, screaming "hud-dup" in a shrill treble, and these self-same frogs, that began their life in the wayside pool in the earlier season, and that have graduated to the wet hollows below, pipe a frolicsome tune by the way of a chorus; but the cattle do not hurry homeward a bit faster. It is a nibble here, and a longer bit of grazing there. How slow they are! I see where the old-time logging-road, now a narrow, winding cow-path, bends its course around a cape of tall pines, and over the knolls crowned with thick mats of the dwarf-blueberry, the new shoots of which are weighed down with rows of waxen-petalled, bell-shaped, snow-white blossoms, as delicately wrought by Nature as they are perfet in proportion, reaching on through and between the tangles of tus-

socks and broad patches of lambkill, the scarlet kalmia, that is thought to be so poisonous to the nibbling sheep, and the flower of which is so rich in simple beauty and so poverty-stricken in its fragrance.

How reluctantly the cows pass through this last barrier between them and the sloping barn-sheds, whose only tenants by day are the noisy swallows and the numerous harem of Chanticleer, mayhap with a hint of clandestine visit to the lower meadow lingering about their perfumed cuds! How heavily swing their distended udders at every lagging step! They stop in the highway to throw a spray of dirt high over their brown backs with a quick, deft movement of the fore-foot, or to lazily toss their heads or swish their tails about their sides as the flies that have kept them company all day get too troublesome. A single cow-bell announces with deep musical note the movement of the leader of the herd. The hill-slopes above the barn blush red under the level rays of the sun going slowly down, but the herd has gone up the lane to the barns, and a broad phalanx of thin gray shadows creeps slowly after them with long, silent strides. I hear the "soh! soh!" and the sharp, querulous injunction "stand still!" of the milkers, and the pastoral song of the milk as their coaxing hands fill the foaming pails. I see the farm-hands, with the housewife at their head, come down over the

slope, houseward, to the pantry, with shiny, well filled pails, that have caught the light of the fading sunset, in either hand, where they set their burdens on the low table, to be strained a bit later. What a queer old place this pantry is, with its sharply sloping sanded floor and rows of broad shelves with their cream-risen pans of milk, its old stone cream-jar and dozen or more freshly made cheeses! what a cool place even in the hottest days of summer, with the blue paper curtain at its single northward-looking window pulled well down, and into which a ray of sunlight never shone, and that was raised rarely ever the width of a foot, even when the pans were being skimmed of their sweet treasures, or the big cheeses were being larded, as they were every morning, and with its every corner full of lurking shadows! Dark and cool as it was, its pine shelves were diligently scrubbed from time to time, until they shone like thick sheets of polished amber, and the weekly-washed floor was every morning sprinkled with fresh, white sand from the outlet of the pine-rimmed pond back of the hill.

As a boy, I remember this abode of cool, dusky shadows and its quaint belongings very well: and best of all, the old musket, that had killed its bear in the pioneer days; and the big powder-horn, that hung by a stout leather string, that had been slipped between the rusty barrel and the end of

its long iron ramrod. It was a kind of child-fun, surreptitiously gained, whenever I could steal into the old pantry and coax a spark or two from the battered flint, long ago fastened into its clumsy hammer, mayhap, when its gray-haired owner was a young man, or when brave old "granther Spurr" used to carry it on his hunting expeditions, that were many and richly rewarded, if tradition tells the truth. Those were days when these fields, deeply covered with thick woods, were peopled with a predatory race that has disappeared forever. This old powder-horn always had a great fascination for me, with its black tip and big, white butt, scraped down almost to transparency, by the light of some long-ago expired hearth-fire. I always like to think that this relic of the old-fashioned hunting days, and that had been carried in the famous but bloodless Madawaska War, was like those used by the farmers of Concord when they

"Fired the shot heard round the world;" —

and many a time, when a youngster, I have slung its burnished crescent over my shoulders, and, with the rusty bayonet fixed to the still more rusty muzzle of this antiquated fire-arm, with the cracked leather cartridge-box belted to my hips, played "soger" in the long well-room to my heart's content.

The coolness of the woods is blown up over the slopes, and down in the swale under the rim of the orchard; the frogs croak their content that the heats of the day are over. The air is full of nocturnal notes of cricket and katydid, and through them all comes the sound of rippling waters, like a strain of low, sweet music. The bushes by the roadside and the tall grasses in the swale are alight with the flickering candle that

> "The glow-worm hangs out to allure
> Her mate to her green bower at night."

The moist air is full of the perfume of the dewy farm-lands. The thistle has long ago folded its pink petals close together; the chickaree family has gone to bed in the woodpile; the bees in their hives under the pomegranate-trees have lapsed into silence; and the mid-day wide-thrown doors of the woodshed are close-shut and fastened with their long oaken bar. So night comes, and amid the dusky shadows of the barn-yard the only sound is the loud snore of the cattle. Its four-footed tenants and its feathered harem sleep on till the sunrise, but the trickling song of the watering-trough by the road is never hushed.

A DROP OF RAIN.

A DROP OF RAIN.

S the wind east or south-east? The weather-wise shakes his head dubiously, and says, with his finger to the breeze, "the air feels wet;" when, putting his barometer in his trousers pocket, he saunters down his fields and awaits with patience the coming rain. Is the wind from the south? do the mackerel-backs scud inland from the coast? Our farmer is still on the lookout for a dull day, but with the wind blowing stiffly from the west he plans to cut the largest field of grass, trusting to his hay-makers and the sun to make his hay. To-day the wind is in the west, and the mowing-machine clanks and clatters up the hill into the middle of the farm, while the men shoulder their scythes and follow after. Amid the music of whetstone, of ringing steel, and the smothered song of the two-horse mower, the humming of the bees, the falling clover, the whistle of the bobolink in the cherry-trees, and the hearty laugh of the men as with glittering scythes they chop out among the gnarled trunks in the apple orchard, the grass goes down the long forenoon.

How naturally men scan the sky to glean some hint of what the morrow will bring of fair or foul, who find their occupation out-of-doors; but not more so than the traveller who just now remembers the old saw of "Evening red, and morning gray," whether it will pour down rain upon his head, or, what is better, set him on his way. When the cuckoo sings his double note in the lowlands — and sweeter tone no bird-throat ever knew than the cuckoo's liquid speech — his prophecy is not to be disregarded, — so the farmer says. He is singing up the rain with a siren voice. Our farmer says it is a sure sign of wet. How the swallows dip and skim along the stubble and over the bending cat's-tail grass and rank clover before the coming storm. The winds, the cuckoos, the swallows, and the tree-toads belong to a weather-wise family.

A speck of cloud in the west is oftentimes watched with great interest when the grass lies in the swath. It may hide the sky in a single hour, but the hay-makers crowd the work all the harder. How the steel glitters afield among the wind-rows and growing hay-cocks as the signs of rain thicken. The wind has shifted into the south, and whenever the wind sets from that quarter, with a storm-cloud in the west, the shower is sure to go across lots, and the uplands in its pathway will get a good drenching. The rain is ever wel-

come if we are prepared for it, but how about our neighbor. When a storm is brewing among the hills after a sultry forenoon, it is field-day on the uplands for the swift-winged swallows, who hardly wait for mid-day to get well past before they begin their multiplex gyrations, shooting in and out among the hay-makers, scouring the stubble for insects, with many a shrill, clear whistle and fife-like note, dodging here and there, now high, now low, sweeping, skimming, and curveting over and among the orchard tree-tops with arrowy, graceful flight, their coats of polished purple gleaming in the afternoon sun with every dip and rise awing like bits of blued steel. What endless troops of these barn-dwellers march and countermarch over the broad highways of the winds, and with what celerity and brilliancy of movement do they execute these aërial passings to and fro, forward, right and left, back, always singly and never by file or platoon. Each swallow holds all the commissions in his division, from brigadier down, and incorrigible-like "trains" on his "own hook" much the same as did the rustic militia of a half a century ago, though he is never in the "awkward squad."

The swallows and the robins are the only birds that keep their courage in the face of a coming storm. One may sometimes catch the tremolo note of the upland plover as down he comes from his soaring, to his nest in the grass, his wings

making an arch of quivering feathers over his back as he alights, when the rain has broken on the wooded slopes across the river valley, but all other bird-throats are silent. The tree-toad tunes up, and the orchard palpitates with the music of this invisible singer. If among the apple-trees you discover a gnarled trunk, with a shallow recess or hole about it, then you are sure, at least you are very like, to find this mellow-voiced *hylas* cosily secreted within it, practising his charming ventriloquism. He will play "hide and go seek" with you all the summer afternoon, but he reverses the old school game, in which the seeker was wont to blind his eyes, and, with a half audible, sing-song, but rapid articulation, repeat this rhythmic incantation of childhood days, —

"Hinty, minty, cuticorn,
Apple seed, and apple thorn,
Wire, briar, limber lock
Twelve mice in a clock.
Sit and sing by the spring
Where my fathers used to dwell;
There are diamonds, there are rings,
There are many pretty things
Where the fairy sits and sings," —

and then, with a loud, shrill "Hoo!" to begin the search. The tree-toad sings his "tan-ta-ra" to you, and challenges you to an immediate search, laughing in your face the whole time as he con-

templates your stupidity and your obliquity of vision. He stares at you with side-splitting cachinnations, while you stare at everything else but the object of your search. At last you find him, only to wonder that so little a fellow can make such a fusillade of sound. Size does not always count in Nature, as anybody can tell who has made a "sparring match" with the infuriated hornet of the meadows.

The veery, or Wilson's thrush, throws a slender bar of song to the darkening air, and it comes clear and sweet, like the tone of some far-off bell, over the tops of the lowland woods. When the last note dies away, we wish it might have been prolonged, so tuneful and weird-like is the strain, with so little suggestion of earth and so much of the upper spheres in its melody. The shower is coming. The wind freshens or dies away, when the sun scalds one's shoulders with its heat. Under the dome of this July sky its overarching walls seem like those of a huge oven, the draughts of which are tightly shut, so heavy, so stagnant is its heated atmosphere. Now the sun smites one, with its swift, hot blows, among the wilted swaths. It is a beautiful sight to watch the coming of the summer shower, as this tiny cloud, this far-off speck of gray, grows into the vast cumuli of brilliant vapor, with dome of snowy whiteness towering above dome of heavier, darker mist, and over

which glow and fade all the colors of a prism, looming higher and higher up, to finally shut out the sun, filling the landscape with deep, broad shadow. What iridescence, what hues of mother-of-pearl play over its topmost crest! How silent is Nature, as if cognizant of the coming battle of the wind and rain! The landscape is breathless in the gloom fast settling over its hills and valleys; but a sudden coolness blows across the lowland pastures, and up over the slopes of the mowing-fields. The trees sing low, crooning songs as the winds chase through their tops; the bending grasses look like chopped seas of color; still the men are at work afield. The base of the huge cloud grows still darker and more threatening. Its lower edge makes a sharp, black line against the streak of greenish yellow sky which separates it from the horizon, while downward and across it run zig-zag lines of swiftly blinding light. What mighty leaps this subtle fluid takes from cloud to cloud! Ah, that dropping chain of flame! as if the Demon of the Storm, in his attempt to marshal his minions to combat, had lost his footing, to come tumbling down over the ragged precipices, the deep cañons of the air, to strike the earth with dire shock, dragging his servitors, and every one a king, with him. What sharp, scimitar-like edge has this first levin bolt, shot from the black depths of this swift-footed rain-cloud! How white

the smoke of the farm-house chimney, as it drifts slowly through the stagnant air and over the tops of the elms in the door-yard, to fall later in tiny atoms to the ground with the rain!

A gray wall of falling rain hides the far-away mountains; there is a low muttering of thunder beyond the ragged spur of old Porcupine; the gray wall has reached the river, the wind has blown itself out, and the big drops of wet come down, one at a time, striking athwart the stubble with a dull thud. The skirmish-line of the storm has passed on; the coppery, yellowish streak has changed from west to east. A single robin pipes an encouraging whistle; a blinding flash of lightning, that comes so near you hear its flapping and hissing ere the terrible crash can jar the earth beneath your feet, has torn the clouds asunder, and the hoarse roar of the thunder, breaking over the woods, is drowned in the besom of the storm, as it rakes the valley with its hail of driving rain. On more than one like occasion I remember our getting to the house at something better than a dog-trot when the last hay-cap had been pinned down, and how we carried our steel-tined forks with their glittering points downward, lest they should attract some stray current of electricity. One never knows, in a thunder-storm, when the atmosphere is so highly charged, what slight attraction may change the course of a stray spark

from these invisible Leyden jars, these batteries of Nature. But the hurry is over; the hay is rolled up; the white caps, of duck, or thinner cotton cloth, are all on, and what does it matter if the hay-maker gets a drenching, so long as the hay is dry.

Men look at the sky and at their barometers to forecast the coming of winds, of changing weather, of damp sea-mists and storm. Men look over the area of humanity to glean some hints of action. Like the physician, who feels the pulse of his patient or listens at the portal of the heart for signs of warning, men feel along the restless, throbbing current of life, listen for the rasping breath of discontent, the irregular and spasmodic movements among human industries, the stilling of anvil and of loom. Storms gather and break, and yet wise men work on through them all until their labor is completed. The more material things in life find their analogies in Nature.

To get on in life, one must read the signs of the times as he does his books or stock-lists. One must strike out boldly into the centre of the world's great highway, where competition is keenest, where people make a noise in earnest. It is a broad acquaintance that men must make to succeed, and broad marks tell if one makes enough of them.

Visual experience, like familiarity of touch, is the secret of confidence. It is said, Dr. Agnew's

use of the knife is something marvellous. I have heard it said of his skill as a surgeon, that he had taught his left hand its brother's dexterity. Look out over men and things as the farmer looks over the hills and valleys and up into the sky, when he has some fair-weather plans afoot. Make your own comparisons; study your chances as the sailor does his barometer; reason for yourself, and when you have put your hand to the doing of a thing, do not leave it until you have accomplished all you have originally planned. If a shower comes out of the west, stick to the pitchfork and rake until the hay is safe. Some men are ever ready to dodge an issue, to throw down their tools and run for shelter at the first sign of a storm, but they are usually the men who rake after the cart. They have nothing at stake but their own thin skins.

The greatest men, and as well the greatest women, in the world have been those who knew most of humanity, most of humankind and whose hearts were nearest Nature. The man who hears in the babbling brook a sweet song, who sees in the woods and in the limpid waters plainly written sermons, who looks upon the rocks, the trees, and the blossoming fields with a spirit of fellowship, needs no other cloister, no other faith. It is a simple creed, but God wrote it himself. Man and Nature are of the same kith and kin; God made both.

What one gleans from books is not all of education. I knew a man in days gone by, a graduate from a distinguished New England college, who could tell you all about Latin and Greek roots, and who later was graduated from a well known theological seminary with some degree of honor, who, when his health began to fail him, because of overstudy, went back to the old homestead among the hills and took up the plough. This man, though he knew so much of dead languages, so much of higher mathematics and of philosophy, so much of all that was choice in literature, went about his farm with his cart-axles groaning and squeaking so loudly that his neighbors might hear them a half-mile away. One day he started out with his oxen and cart for the adjacent grist-mill. He had not gone far when he met a neighbor: —

"Wal, deacon, 'pears like them air wheels o' yourn air purty dry. I've hearn 'em squeakin' more this year 'n ever. Why don't yer grease 'em, deacon? Sounds kinder lon'som' like t' hear 'em whinin' up an' daown hill, an' 'cross th' fields."

"Why, sir, it *nev*er oc*curred* to me, but I think it might be a *ver*y *excel*lent plan. I believe father did something of the kind when I was a boy."

"The dern fool! I alluz tho't 'twas a mean stre'k; but, I swaow, th' critter don't know eny better. Wal, I declar' t' Jerusha, ef thet don't beat all! an' collidge eddicated tew!"

So it was with all the machinery about the deacon's farm. Everything soon wore out, because there was a lack of knowledge of common things. He could not decipher Nature's cost-mark. I have been told the same man got lost in sight of his own house one summer day, but for its truth I could not vouch. As I saw him at one place and another, I often queried within myself whether he knew a robin by his whistle, or the difference between a red-spot trout and the lubberly sucker we used to spear in the early spring-time, after the ice had gone out of the ponds; whether he could make music out of the honk of the wild-goose or the cry of the loon when he halloos into the blackness of the night. An overdose of laudanum does not always kill, an overdose of book-learning might as well if it makes a fool of a man in other things. Men born with a deformity of brain are to be pitied; but they are not so badly off as their neighbors who, through much learning, have lost the sign-manual of Nature, whose moods and tenses are never of days and sounds, but rather of grammar and of books with narrow margins. I admire a man who insists upon a broad margin to his book, as to everything else. One wants to make a reference note occasionally. The better things in life are deep-rooted. There is no virtue in shallow soil. If the horizon of living is narrow, get outside and beyond it; get above it, so that

you may overlook it, and the whole world as well. Don't hesitate to read a lesson from your successful neighbor, his store, field, or garden.

Gibson found a wild-flower garden in his back-yard; your own may be richer in suggestion. The weeds that grow in the shadows of the roadside fences and hedge-rows are not the least important of the highway's possessions, and a passing glance is not enough even for them. "Day unto day uttereth speech," and these dumb things in Nature have a very intelligible way of imparting information after all. They are the raised type of Nature: one has to touch things in her domain to know their secrets. Touch is *the* Sense that dominates everything, after all. What one can touch, one likes to possess. What an immense estate this Nature World! The world at large is the legal heir; as for myself, I may administer upon my share of it without giving bond. It is my own fault if I get not my own. It is with others as with myself. Get the way of a thing as the farmer does the hint of a stormy day, by feeling for it.

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